

THE
COLONEL'S
OPERA
CLOAK





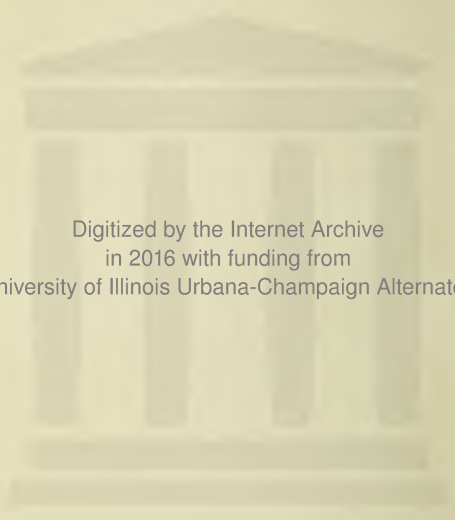
This book
is presented to
Illinois Wesleyan
University by

**PRESIDENT
MINOR MYERS, JR.**



Illinois Wesleyan University
Sheean Library
P.O. Box 2899
Bloomington, IL 61702-2899

The Colonel's Opera Cloak



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

By
Christine C. Brush

With Illustrations from Drawings by E. W. Kemble
and Arthur E. Becher

Boston
Little, Brown, and Company
1904

PZ
3
B839
C65

Copyright, 1879,
By Roberts Brothers.

Copyright, 1903,
By Little, Brown, and Company.

University Press · John Wilson & Son
Cambridge, U. S. A.

FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

From Drawings by Arthur E. Becher

“He triumphantly emerged, with a large blue cape lined with scarlet”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“The opera cloak hung on a chair by the fire”	<i>Facing Page 83</i>
“Tom was angry, but he could n’t help laughing”	“ 152
“It was the Colonel’s opera cloak”	“ 252

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

From Drawings by E. W. Kemble

Introduction, heading	<i>Page 1</i>
Chapter heading	“ 7
Pomp	“ 10
“There was a pair of cavalry-boots under the piano”	“ 12
Mr. Cavello	“ 16
Chapter heading	“ 24
“At the sound of the closing door he sprang from his seat”	“ 40

Illustrations

“ Finally fled into a dark alley and eluded the enraged lover ”	<i>Page</i> 42
Chapter heading	“ 44
“ He cooks his own food, and mends his own clothes ”	“ 46
“ While Mr. Ackerman was showing Leslie his old-fashioned costumes ”	“ 56
Chapter heading	“ 58
“ One day Pomp appeared at the Doctor’s with a large tray ”	“ 61
“ He sent Bessie a parrot in a beautiful gilt cage ”	“ 67
“ “ I reckon he’s at a club, eating sweetbread and quails ” ”	“ 71
“ “ O you dear opera cloak ! ” ”	“ 73
Chapter heading	“ 74
“ She was dazzled by a light in her face ” . .	“ 86
“ He held out to her the Colonel’s opera cloak ”	“ 93
“ Endeavoring to raise his glaring white eyes over the rails of the small iron fence ” . . .	“ 99
Chapter heading	“ 105
“ Drawing the Colonel’s opera cloak about him, . . . turned his face toward home ” . .	“ 118
“ “ Goes scootin’ round wid a cane, an’ one o’ dem high-top hats, like Massa Tom’s ” ” .	“ 123
Chapter heading	“ 127
Mr. MacVickar	“ 142
Chapter heading	“ 147

Illustrations

Uncle Peter	<i>Page</i> 153
“ ‘ An’ ye’r sort o’ cased in ice ’ ”	“ 158
Chapter heading	“ 178
“ A gentleman had driven up to the hotel door, where the landlord was standing in portly dignity ”	“ 185
“ He saw a little boy running at full speed past him ”	“ 200
“ Leslie slipped away to her room, and cried her- self to sleep ”	“ 210
Chapter heading	“ 216
Chapter heading	“ 236
“ Pomp brought some cologne, and bathed her aching head ”	“ 239
“ He took Tom for a fellow-sufferer ”	“ 244
“ A tall, stout man, with a slouched hat ”	“ 249
“ ‘ Well,’ he went on, looking at her with his ‘ smiling eyes,’ as Leslie called them ”	“ 251
Tail-piece	“ 262



Introduction

I HAVE no hero; I have no heroine. A story without either seemed so shabby, and incomplete a thing that I looked carefully over my old men and women, my young men and maidens, not omitting the small boys.

Colonel St. John was tall and handsome, — “a perfect specimen of a Southern gentleman,” his wife said. But, having never met the Colonel, I could not make him my hero.

Mrs. St. John was handsome, slender, and languid. How she did hate the North! She was not to my fancy, so I would not have her for my heroine.

Dear little Leslie, the Colonel's niece, — I had half a mind to choose her. But she never saved a life, and never wrote a page for a magazine, not even “Lines to E. S. L.” She never

Introduction

attended lectures, nor revelled in “the True, the Good, and the Beautiful;” and, if the truth must be told, she spelled quite indifferently.

There was Tom Douglas, the Doctor’s son, who fell in love with Leslie. If he had but fallen in love with Miss Gertrude Henderson, the handsome heiress, and followed her abroad, what a hero and heroine they would have been! In that case, what descriptions I might have given of foreign parts, — of cathedrals and of palaces! I could have made them wander in the grand old galleries, and talk about the pictures. I should have known exactly what to say; for haven’t I a pile of my cousin’s old guide-books, from which I could extract the height and width of every thing, as well as though I had taken measurements myself? And Tom could have made love in Westminster Abbey or the Bois de Boulogne. But, dear me, he fell in love instead with that foolish, shiftless little Leslie.

If I had been satisfied with a good, noble, unselfish man, I might have chosen Pomp; but Pomp was only a colored man, a “nigger,” an old slave, who clung through thick and thin — very thin — to his master’s family, and got

Introduction

nothing in return. Only the angels would call Pomp a hero.

Dr. Douglas would not do, of course: there was nothing romantic about the Doctor. He doled the St. Johns among his other patients, and got no return for the little bills he presented,—that was all. “What impudence in him to send these things!” said Mrs. St. John, when the Doctor’s collector appeared. “How these Northerners show their poor raising!”

The Doctor’s wife would not answer. Her affairs were settled thirty years ago, when, in white muslin and blue ribbons, she met the young doctor at a college commencement. Besides, she spent her time in seeing that her Tom should not become Leslie’s hero! “Leslie is a dear, sweet little girl,” she would say, in that disparaging, maternal tone well known to eldest sons; “but for a wife,—I pity the Northerner of whose home she is mistress!” Then Tom would ask, in a cheerful tone of disinterested inquiry, “Is there any Northerner who wishes to marry her?”

There was Bessie Douglas, Tom’s sister; but Bessie was not pretty enough for a heroine. It is so much easier to have a pretty heroine. No

Introduction

matter what silly things she may say or do, the reader does not wonder at the hero's falling in love with her. A plain girl has to utter such brilliant things, to satisfy the public!

There was a troop of little St. Johns, — Arthur, Wilfrid, and Clarence; but they looked so much alike, and were so tangled up, wearing each other's clothes indiscriminately, that this small band of brothers would have filled the office of hero to overflowing.

With so many grown-up white ladies and gentlemen on hand, it would hardly have been respectful to take Pomp's grandson as hero, although his name might well have suggested the choice, — "John Jasper Jackson." Jackson was not his last name, — he had none: it was only one of his names. Jackson John Jasper, or Jasper Jackson John, answered just as well.

There was Mr. Cavello; but I knew so little of Spaniards, — I only knew Mr. Cavello, — and so little of Spanish, — only "Señor" and "San Salvador," — and so little of Spanish affairs, — only a few items about coffee and sugar plantations and cigarettes, — that I hardly felt equal to using Mr. Cavello.

But there was a being — I may call it that,

Introduction

because it had being — which often warmed and clothed the St. John family; which was with them by day and by night, in pleasure and in sorrow; which delivered them from dire distresses by land and sea; which neither ate their food nor spent their money; which did not smoke, nor play, nor drink, like the Colonel. This being I have chosen for my leading character. Enter

THE COLONEL'S OPERA CLOAK.



I

LITTLE Ned Douglas was fired with an earnest desire to possess a certain scarlet and gold "Pilgrim's Progress," which had been shown to the admiring eyes of the children in his Sunday school, as a reward to the one who should bring in the largest number of new scholars. Ned had determined to win the prize.

Strange to say, the "new scholars" whom Ned secured were all short of clothes. One day he appeared, flushed and excited, at the dinner-table, demanding three hats, a purple necktie, two pairs of shoes, and a few handkerchiefs.

"Have you found a boy with four feet, three heads, a few noses, and only one neck?" asked Tom.

"No!" cried little Ned, indignantly: "there are three boys, and one is black. He's a friend

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

of the white boys, and they live in his house. I played with them in the park one day, and they are all splendid! They used to be rich, and now they are poor. I guess they are poor," he added, rather doubtfully, "because they said they'd all come to Sunday school if I'd get them shoes and hats and handkerchiefs; and the little black boy wanted a purple necktie. But they have splendid jack-knives, and they eat candy all the time, and chew Jenny-Lind gum! *Their* mother lets them do it," and little Ned looked reproachfully at his mother.

The new acquaintances were soon provided with clothes, and they entered the school the next Sunday.

"Is n't it queer?" said Ned, some time after this. "Those splendid boys used to live in the South, and they were as rich as kings, and had lots of slaves. One of them said that *we* got his slaves away. I told him 't was no such thing. I told him that you and father used to live in the South, but you did n't touch their slaves. Arthur — he's the biggest boy — says his mother is sick, and wants you to come and see her. She said she had n't seen a real lady for a year."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Is n't it papa she wants to see, if she is ill?" asked his mother.

"Oh, no, mamma, it is you; and she wants you to come quick. She says she'll come to church some day, maybe."

Mrs. Douglas went the very next day, provided with the address on a card. She was sure when she reached the house that Ned had made a mistake; for it was in a fashionable part of the city.

She found a handsome residence, with high steps, on which two dirty white boys were playing with a little black boy who was not so dirty.

"Does Mrs. St. John live here?" asked Mrs. Douglas.

"Yes, ma'am," said one of the boys, rising and taking off his hat. "Won't you come in?"

"I'm Ned Douglas's mother. Are you the St. John boys?" she said, smiling.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the little fellow who had already spoken. "Mamma wanted to see you very much. She's away from all her friends here, and Ned said you'd lived South. Get up, you varmint!" he added pleasantly to the colored boy, "and see if the bell will go."

The little chap rattled the knob, which had

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

evidently parted company with the bell, and pounded on the door with his fists.

"I'll tell you what to do, Jasper," said one of the boys: "you crawl into the basement window, and run and open the door."

The little fellow was soon heard tugging at the lock from the inside. After repeated efforts, the door burst open, and sent him sprawling on his back upon the hall floor, like a little turtle.

"Dat ain't no kind of a do', Missus," said he, picking himself up, and rubbing his head: "it keeps a sayin' it won't open, an', jus' as yer b'lieves it, out it hits an' sends yer slambang! Dat door's jus' like my gran'fa': 'pears like he's never goin' to lick yer, no matter what yer does; an', fus' thing, he fetches yer a cuff, an' over yer goes."



While Jasper was thus moralizing, Mrs. Douglas looked about to see if the parlors were accessible. Hearing a noise above, she involuntarily glanced up, and saw the dark sallow face of a man, and as much of his body as could be safely balanced over the banisters, and heard a child's giggle.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

At that moment, a moist little pellet struck her cheek. Then followed a scuffle, a slap, "You nasty boy!" and the slamming of a door.

The front door was too securely closed, or she would have retreated.

Just then a black man came up the basement stairs, and bowed respectfully.

"Can I see Mrs. St. John?" asked Mrs. Douglas.

"Yes, Missus, if yer will have de goodness to wait one moment whiles I opens de parlor do'. De knob, I sees, is off," he said, as calmly as if it was quite usual for knobs to step out on business.

He vanished into the back parlor, where a murmuring conversation was soon heard.

The sliding-door groaned, and evidently ran off its track. Then with a flourish, as if he had that instant heard of the arrival there, Pomp opened the front-parlor door.

Such a parlor! The shades were drawn to the highest point, the lace curtains were tied in knots; and, raising her eyes to the frescoed ceiling, Mrs. Douglas saw that her unseen friend of the spit-ball had not aimed his first at her, — no, nor his twenty-first.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

There was a pair of cavalry-boots under the piano, and a pan of molasses-candy on top of it. A bowl of broth stood on the centre-table.

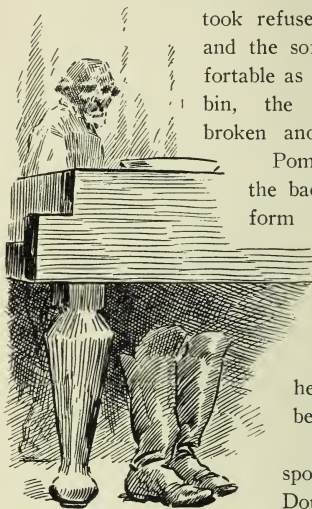
The chair which Mrs. Douglas took refused to hold her; and the sofa was as comfortable as a seat in a coal-bin, the springs being broken and twisted.

Pomp retired into the back parlor to inform "Missus" that the lady was in the other room.

The rustle of silk was now heard, and the beating of pillows.

No word was spoken; but Mrs. Douglas was conscious of the pantomime which was directing Pomp as he squeaked about the apartment.

At last, he appeared at the sliding-door, which



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

had refused to close behind him, and asked her in, with, "Mrs. Douglas — Mrs. St. John."

In a bed, in one corner of the finely furnished room, Mrs. St. John half-sat, half-lay. She motioned Mrs. Douglas to a chair, which the poor lady tested with her hand before seating herself.

Mrs. St. John was a young and very handsome woman. She wore a lilac silk waist, with a lace shawl thrown over her shoulders, fastened with a diamond pin. Mrs. Douglas saw the skirt of the lilac waist over a chair at the head of the bed: it only accompanied the lady on walking excursions!

Mrs. St. John was very languid.

"You can't tell how glad I am to see some one who has lived South," she said, in a low, drawling voice. "These Northerners are so ill-bred. I hate to have my boys associate with them, — it's so bad for their manners. I see the difference in them already. I believe it's in the air.

"The war made things very hard for the Colonel. He fought and fought; and the Northerners stole everything they could lay their hands on. Why, the officers, generals

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and all, would steal the rings off our fingers; and they grudged us every mouthful we ate! I was very young; I was married during the war; but I saw enough of it. Why, one of your generals — the head one, I reckon — tore the ear-rings right out of a lady's ears! The Colonel lost all his slaves, and I lost all mine, except Pomp: he knew what was good for him! The ungrateful things, — to clear out, after we had fed and clothed them for generations!

“The Colonel had heaps of money stolen by your men. He owns heaps of land in Texas now, where there are lead-mines; but he can't get much money out of it at a time, and so Pomp has to keep things going as best he can. It's very different from the good old days.

“The Colonel brought us all here, and then went out to his old mines. I'm so much younger than he, he ought to stay at home and look after me. I was only sixteen when I was married.

“The last time the Colonel was at home, he brought back a Spanish gentleman, Mr. Cavello, to visit. He met up with him in New Orleans. The Colonel said he wanted to see the city, and that he was a good friend of his. He goes to his club to meals.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I think," continued Mrs. St. John, — whose slow words knew no pause, — "I think the Colonel has had money of him, or he'd never be so polite to him."

"Do you know any thing about him?" the Doctor's wife ventured to ask.

"Oh, he's what he says he is, — as rich as can be! He tells about his niggers and his plantations, and he has good diamonds. I wish he'd take a fancy to the Colonel's niece, — it would be a good thing for her.

"I never am very well," she went on. "I like to lie down, — it's so much easier than to sit up. It's so cold here that I never can keep warm out of bed, and hardly in it. — Pomp! Pomp!"

Mrs. Douglas had seen Pomp through the door, nodding in one of the red satin chairs. He started on hearing his name.

"Pomp, my feet are cold! Bring me the Colonel's opera cloak."

Pomp began a search. He looked in the closet and behind the chairs, and finally went on all fours under the bed, whence he triumphantly emerged, with a large blue cape, lined with scarlet, with shining gilt clasps at the neck.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, I was telling you about Leslie," said Mrs. St. John, after Pomp had tucked her feet up, and settled himself for another nap. "I



wish I could marry that girl off to some rich Northerner. She says she likes them. She's seventeen now, and over. When the summer comes, I mean to get her a lot of new dresses, and take her to some fashionable resort for a month, to see if I can't get her off. She has no mother, and I must do my duty by her. I wish to mercy Mr. Cavello would take a fancy to her!"

There was a silence. Mrs. Douglas was horror-stricken.

The Doctor's wife feared that Mrs. St. John expected her now to take her turn, in revealing all the Doctor's weak points. Disappointment awaited her. Why, Mrs. Douglas only called them "the Doctor's ways," to herself.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

But no, Mrs. St. John was only taking breath to go on with her own affairs.

"Pomp! Pomp! call Miss Leslie."

Pomp opened the door into the hall, when instantly there was a scampering and scuffling.

"Yer unmannered boys, hain't yer got no 'ligion, to make yer act like gent'men? Don't yer know de Bible, — 'Member yer fader an' moder to keep 'em holy!' Peekin' frou de do' at de strange lady, actin' 's ef yer was raised Norf!"

Leslie St. John, having been summoned by Pomp, came shyly into the room. Mrs. Douglas took to her at once. No one could help it, she was so sweet. She drew the girl toward her and kissed her, although she had only meant to shake hands; and Leslie loved her from that minute.

"This is the Colonel's niece, that I was telling you about," said Mrs. St. John. "She's an orphan, and has n't a cent. Well, I hope the Northerners are satisfied, when they see the poor starved orphans they made." And Mrs. St. John looked severely at Mrs. Douglas, as if she had personally been upon the war-path.

Leslie hung her head: she did not fancy

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

being exhibited as a representative Southern orphan.

The door now opened, and the boys rushed in.

"Mamma," cried one of them, "excuse me for interrupting you, but we must have a new foot-ball at once."

"Arthur, you shall not have one cent! I'm going to buy coal this time! It's a very poor way," she added, turning to Mrs. Douglas, "to get it every few hours in a basket. Jasper forgets it, and the furnace gets low."

"I want a foot-ball, too," said little Clarence, slipping round to the bed-side. "Arthur never lets me play with his."

"Look a-here, Missus," interposed Jasper, with wide-open eyes, "Massa Clar'nce don't no more need dat foot-ball dan he needs anoder foot. Dem little ten cent toss-balls is good enough for sech a little boy as Massa Clar'nce."

"'Tain't neither," replied Clarence, aiming a blow at Jasper.

"Where is that last foot-ball gone?" said Mrs. St. John, languidly.

"It's burnt up, Missus," said Jasper.

"Who burnt it?"

"Nobody ain't burnt it but de furnace, Missus.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Massa Arthur he put it in de coal-hod when he got frou playin', an' I did n't see it, an' petched it into de furnace."

"Yer ought to 'er looked," said Pomp, in a sharp tone, joining the group around Mrs. St. John, which by this time suggested the death-bed of Luther. "Yer ought to 'er looked to see ef de foot-ball was in de hod! you're drefful keerless. I 'spect some day you'll frow de silver teapot, what's got Missus' great-grand-moder's name on to it, into de furnace." And Pomp cast a sidelong glance at Mrs. Douglas. "Yer must be more keerful to allers look in de hod: yer burnt up one of my bes' shoes t' other day, yer knows."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. St. John, fretfully, "do go away: you want to kill me, I know. Here, Arthur, take this twenty-dollar bill, spend five dollars for all of you, and bring me back the change."

Before long, Jasper returned, and laid a bill on the bed.

"I want — I want — let me see," said Mrs. St. John: "why, I want fifteen dollars, and here's only five."

"Why," said Jasper, his eyes starting out white and round, "yer said how 't every one on

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

'em was to hev five dollars. Massa Arthur an' Massa Wilfrid dey got foot-balls an' knives an' heaps o' things, an' Massa Clar'nce kicked 'em, in de store, an' hollared, an' dey had to buy him things."

"That's just the way those boys act since they came North," said the poor lady, feebly shaking her head.

Pomp had been nodding again in the satin chair. He roused himself at Jasper's voice, and came into the room.

"I 'se gwine to market now, Miss Marie," said he to Mrs. St. John, "an' I wants five dollars, ef yer pleases. Ef I don't go now, I 'specs yer'll give Massa Cavello a foot-ball next, an' den dare won't be no mouf-balls for to eat when de dinner-time comes."

Mrs. St. John handed him the money.

"Now you've got the last cent, Pomp, and I hope you're satisfied!" she said.

"Ef I could ever git de fust an' de middle an' de las'," said Pomp to himself, "I reckon things would n't go so contr'y as dey does now in dis house."

Mrs. Douglas was uneasy. What sort of a woman was this? Who were these people? She

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

rose to go. Mrs. St. John begged her to come in often.

Leslie sat in the shadow.

"You must come and see me, my dear," said Mrs. Douglas, turning to her.

"Do you really want me to come?" asked the girl, brightening.

"Leslie!" said her aunt, in such a tone that the girl blushed painfully.

"Certainly I do," said the Doctor's wife. "I shall look for you next week."

During the call, Mrs. St. John had mentioned a friend of the Colonel's, — Frank Merriam, — whose wife Mrs. Douglas knew. As soon as she reached home, she seated herself and wrote to her friend: —

DEAR MARY, — Did you ever hear of a Colonel St. John? Who is he? Where is he? Where did you hear of him? Did you ever see Mrs. St. John? They have hired an elegantly furnished house on Margrave Street, which now has the air of an auction-shop, — no, that is feeble, — nothing less than an earthquake, assisted by chain-lightning, could have wrought such changes!

They evidently walk on the ceiling; the colored servant sleeps in the red satin chairs; they spill broth over the Moquette carpets, and leave molasses

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

candy pans on the piano. Every thing is done that ought not to be done, and nothing is done that ought to be done.

They take presents of shoes from the Sunday school, and spend fifteen dollars *at once* for foot-balls and other toys.

There's a Spaniard visiting in the house, whom the lady dislikes very much.

Do have instant mercy on my curiosity, and let me hear from you.

She soon received the following reply:—

DEAR LOUISE,—I have heard of Colonel St. John. When? A few years ago, soon after our marriage. Where? At Saratoga,—where else does one hear of people? Where is he? Everywhere. Who is he? He's Colonel St. John.

I have asked Frank for particulars. He says they belong to one of the first Southern families. The Colonel is perfectly respectable, he says,—only rather pompous and “high-toned.”

They are poor, having lost every thing in the war, except land of the Colonel's, somewhere in the South or West. Frank says he lives by selling a piece now and then. There is supposed to be a lead-mine, and it is really believed to be valuable, so that he may be well-off some day.

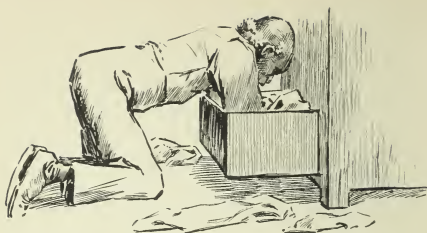
I don't know about the Spaniard. Frank says they have a pretty niece: have you seen her?

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Frank sends word that you must not forget to mention their doings whenever you write. He went to their house once. The chain-lightning and the earthquake had been there also!

I saw the Colonel once at the opera. He looked very picturesque. He wore a cloak lined with scarlet, which gave him a gay, cavalier air. I wanted Frank to buy one, — being romantic in those days, — but he said he would sooner see himself in a gray shawl, pinned at the neck, like old Mr. Simpson, — do you remember?

I would n't have written to a soul but you to-day, for I have such a cold that I dare say my b's are all p's, and my m's are all b's. Tell us more.



II

BESSIE DOUGLAS was longing to see the St. Johns. Mrs. Douglas's account of her call had amused Bessie and her friends, Miss Wentworth and Gertrude Henderson, very much.

"Why can't we have Leslie to tea?" asked Bessie. "What do you suppose she'd wear? Perhaps her aunt's silk skirt, — perhaps the cavalry-boots you saw in the parlor."

"Perhaps the red cloak which Mrs. Merriam saw on the Colonel, and which I saw on Mrs. St. John," said Mrs. Douglas, laughing.

When Leslie was invited to the Doctor's to tea, she was delighted at first, and then her spirits sank.

"O auntie," she said, "I can't go. My dress is n't nice enough."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I'll lend you one of mine," said Mrs. St. John: "it will fit you well enough, I reckon, if you pin the waist over. You can have this lilac silk, if you want it."

There was a black and white checked silk which Leslie would rather have had, but she knew better than to ask for it; so she took the one offered her, and tried to be thankful.

"Yer does n't feel happy, does yer, honey?" said Pomp, as he pinned her collar for her, on the day of the visit.

"No, Pomp. I would really rather stay at home than wear this waist, but Aunt Marie makes me go."

"What would yer have, ef I could find it for yer?" asked Pomp, as though he was a good fairy, able to give three gifts for any three requests.

"Well, Pomp, if I could have that little red India shawl, I could cover up this waist; but I don't dare to ask for it, and, if you do, she won't give it to me."

"Oh, yes, she will!" said Pomp, confidently, as he vanished into the back parlor. He rummaged the bureau-drawers and the wardrobe, until Mrs. St. John fretfully inquired, without

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

raising her eyes from her French novel, what he wanted.

"I 'se lookin' for Massa Clar'nce' new shirt," replied Pomp. "I never see how shirts does act, gittin' into all sorts o' places! Ef *I'd* made clo'es, I'd a gin 'em ears, so dey'd come when dey was called. Here yer am!" he cried triumphantly, shaking out something. "I thought I'd find yer, — none so deaf as dem dat won't hear." And Pomp "wobbed" the shawl into a white garment and hurried it out to Leslie.

Leslie could not remember what she had done with her hat; and, as it was nearly dark, she said she did n't mind, she'd wear Clarence's.

Pomp looked at her admiringly as she set it jauntily on her pretty head. Then he wrapped the opera cloak carefully around her, and gazed after her until she turned the corner.

Leslie had never seen any of the family, except Mrs. Douglas, and hardly dared to ring the bell and face them all.

As she hesitated on the steps, a young man came up and put a latch-key in the door. He knew in a moment that this odd-looking girl was Leslie St. John.

"Have you rung, Miss St. John?" he asked.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I know you, for my sister told me you were coming to tea."

"I haven't rung," said Leslie, dropping her eyes. That was a bad habit, Tom thought, for such pretty eyes. "I was waiting a minute to get courage. I don't know your sister."

"You'll know her soon," said Tom, feeling at once as if he were protecting Leslie. "She's easy enough to get acquainted with. You know my mother?"

"Yes," replied Leslie, "and I think she's lovely. She was so kind, to invite me. I've never been out to tea before in my life."

What a time it had taken to fit that latch-key!

At the opening of the front door, Bessie came into the hall.

"Oh, how do you do?" said she, so cordially that Leslie at once felt at ease. "Did you let her in, Tom?"

"Yes, it was me,
With my little key,—
I let her in,"

said Tom, smiling.

"Oh," thought Leslie, "what a handsome fellow, and so kind and witty and elegant!"

She went into the parlor, but felt very timid

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

when she saw two fashionable young ladies sitting cosily on the sofa by the fire; but she laughed when Bessie introduced her.

"Nobody ever called me Miss St. John before, except your brother, on the steps. I forget whom you mean: could n't you call me Leslie?"

"I could, and I will," said Bessie.

Grace Wentworth made room for Leslie beside her. Gertrude Henderson looked her over: Leslie felt her eyes, and was uncomfortable.

Miss Henderson did not say much. She leaned back in her corner, and looked into the fire, holding her delicate hand before her face. How her rings shone and glistened!

Grace Wentworth and Bessie and Leslie were quite well acquainted by the time the tea-bell rang.

Tom came in then, and Leslie noticed how Miss Henderson's manner changed. She was no longer listless: her eyes brightened, and she laughed and talked, so that Tom had only a chance to smile and nod to Leslie.

When they returned to the parlor after tea, before the gas was lighted, Gertrude Henderson played for them. Tom was on the sofa next to Leslie, who had seated herself in the corner.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"How do you like her playing?" he asked, leaning toward her, while the others were calling for their favorite pieces.

"Oh, it is splendid," said Leslie, "only we ought to have lights, blazing lights, and everybody should be dancing and wear gay dresses, and there should be long mirrors everywhere to make it brighter and gayer."

"Exactly!" said Tom, looking at her with his handsome smiling eyes, — "that's exactly Gertrude's music. I wonder how you'll like Grace Wentworth's!"

Tom did not talk any more to Leslie after Miss Henderson ceased playing. He and Gertrude seemed to talk for all the rest. She was very amusing, and Tom teased her. Leslie wondered how he dared to do so; but Miss Henderson seemed to like it. The others listened and laughed.

After a while, Grace Wentworth played; and Leslie was enchanted.

"Do you like that?" asked Tom.

"Oh, I do, I do," said Leslie: "that's just the kind I always knew I'd like. I never heard it before. I want to shut my eyes and forget every thing."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"And everybody?" asked Tom. "Can't I speak to you again?"

"Oh, I did n't mean that," said Leslie, quite shocked at her seeming rudeness. "I only meant that this was the sort of music for the dark and quiet times. Do you like it?"

"With all my heart," said Tom. "Don't you sing? You look as if you did."

"Oh, yes, I sing for myself, and for Pomp, and to put Clarence to sleep, and for Mr. Cavello — sometimes."

"You don't sing Mr. Cavello to sleep, do you?" asked Tom, laughing.

"Mercy, no!" said Leslie. "I reckon you don't know who Mr. Cavello is."

"Can't you add me to the list of the people you sing to? Come, Grace is through;" and Tom took her hand to lead her to the piano.

"Oh, I don't play a bit," said Leslie, drawing back; "I only sing. I'd rather sing here in the corner."

"Oh, do sing," said Bessie and Grace, who had been listening; "we like the voice alone."

What queer singing it was! The room was perfectly silent. Every one listened. Her voice had a sweet, far-away sound.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds,"
Tom said to himself.

She sang to a swinging, chanting sort of
air, —

"There was a little white cloud in the sky,
I saw it float and float :
I said I will take it for a sign
Of my own dear sailor's boat.
If the little white cloud shall safely sail
By the black cloud rack in the West,
I know my lad will come sailing, sailing
To the lass his heart loves best.
And the little white cloud, it safely sailed
By the black cloud rack in the West,
So I know my love will come sailing, sailing
To the lass his heart loves best."

"Another! another!" cried Bessie. "Your
voice is lovely. Don't you think so, Gertrude?"

"Yes," said she. "With whom did you study,
Miss St. John?"

"I never studied at all, except when I went to
Miss Paynter's boarding-school, and then I didn't
learn much," said Leslie, laughing. "Her niece
came over from England, and she taught me
my songs. I had a fever when I was there,
and she took all the care of me, and was so
kind! She used to sing to me half through
the night, — it was better than medicine. She
sang another song that I like."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, do sing something else," said Grace and Tom at once.

The door-bell rang violently.

"Why do people have door-bells!" said Bessie, impatiently.

A strange voice was heard in the hall. The door opened to admit the visitor. Leslie shrank back into the shadow.

Mrs. Douglas recognized the sallow face of the gentleman who had balanced himself over the banisters the day she called on Mrs. St. John.

The lights were low, and the Doctor turned them up.

"I am Mr. Cavello," said the stranger, standing in the middle of the room and bowing. "Mrs. St. John, she has sent me to have Miss Leslie home."

"I told Pomp to come for me," said Leslie, from the dark corner.

Mr. Cavello turned toward her eagerly. "Your aunt needed Pomp, Miss Leslie."

"Then why didn't the boys come?" she asked. "I told Pomp to send them, if he was busy."

"Myself wanted to come," said Mr. Cavello, standing near her, and looking straight into her

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

eyes, as if no one else was in the room. "I wanted to come."

"I'm not going now," said Leslie, turning her head away almost rudely.

Mrs. Douglas, to break the awkward silence, introduced Mr. Cavello to the young ladies, who were quite ready to be diverted by this addition to their circle.

Leslie slipped away to the other sofa, and seated herself by the Doctor, with a little smile which said so plainly, "May I?" that the good Doctor shook up the sofa pillow, and said, "Certainly, my dear, — certainly."

Then Tom came, and asked her about her songs, and she brightened in spite of the dark looks which Mr. Cavello sent toward her, and Miss Henderson's open endeavors to entice Tom to her side.

Soon Mr. Cavello was absorbed in Miss Wentworth's playing, and offered to sing a Spanish song with the guitar; and he showed Miss Henderson the accompaniment, "tum, tum, tum;" then the minor chord, "la, la, la, la, la." — "You see how it runs." Then he wrote the words for Miss Wentworth, who was delighted with the air.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

It was charming music. Mr. Cavello's voice was rich, and the dainty tinkle of the guitar seemed like the sound of far-off water.

Miss Wentworth said that, if she shut her eyes, she could see a Spanish girl dancing in the sunshine, with a rose in her hair and a lace scarf flying.

"Miss Leslie, she can dance to my music, and make a prettier picture to your open eyes," said Mr. Cavello, turning toward her. "Come, Miss Leslie, you have a red shawl there."

The color faded from Leslie's cheeks; her pretty enthusiasm was gone.

"I cannot dance to your music, Mr. Cavello," she said. "I'm not a Spanish girl, — I don't know how."

The girls begged her to dance; but she shut her lips tightly and shook her head, and they saw that it was of no use to urge her.

While Mr. Cavello was tuning the guitar, the bell rang furiously again, and the hall was filled with boys' voices. The little St. Johns had arrived in full force!

"Mrs. Douglas," said Arthur, coming forward in his graceful way, "Pomp sent us for Leslie."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"But I am come for her, too," said Mr. Cavello. "You may go back" — A third ring drowned his words. A servant hurried to the door.

"Is Massa Cavello here?" said a funny little voice. "Is Massa Arthur here, an' Massa Wilfrid here, an' Massa Clar'nce here, an' Miss Leslie here?" And Jasper appeared at the parlor door.

"Who sent you here, Jasper?" said Arthur. "Go home!"

"My gran'fa' told me to come an' see 'f yer 'd minded him, to come fur Miss Leslie. He s'pected yer 'd done gone off to de theatre, an' forgot Miss Leslie; an' she said how 't she 'd never go home, never, if Massa Cavello comed fur her."

"Well, we did come," said Wilfrid; "but we're going home, and Mr. Cavello is going to take her back."

"My gran'fa' said how 't Massa Cavello warn't fur to take her home," said Jasper.

"Go home yourself, and tell Pomp to mind his own business," said Arthur, shutting the parlor door in Jasper's face, and quietly seating himself, as if nothing had happened.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Please go on with your music. I'm very sorry to have interrupted you, ladies," he said.

"Oh, dear!" whispered Leslie to Tom, who was still by her. "Oh, dear, I am so, so sorry! Your mother will never invite me here again. I'd rather have gone with Mr. Cavello than to have had them all act so."

The boys sat quietly for a while, and then, seeing that this was no party, and that no ice-cream was forthcoming, bade the family good-night, and ran out without one word to Leslie.

The girls were delighted with the new music, and begged Mr. Cavello to give them another song.

Tom took Leslie into the back parlor to show her a picture he had been telling her about. It was a bit of clover-field; and in a cleared place in the foreground two little fairies, with pale blue wings, were "teetering" on a blade of grass thrown across a strawberry plant.

Leslie was pleased with it.

"The lady who painted that dreamed it first, I know," she said.

"But it was n't a lady, at all," said Tom: "it was a young man, a friend of mine, — Bob Simpson. He lives abroad now. I wish I

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

could show you his pictures. They are very funny, — many of them. He's making money fast. Funny pictures sell, — people like to be amused."

"I think I should get tired of a funny picture," said Leslie. "I could n't laugh very long at it. I'd rather borrow one, and send it home again. But I don't know any thing about pictures, as you do."

"Do you remember Hamon's 'Autumn,' or the 'Twilight'?" asked Tom.

"No," said Leslie. She did not like sentences beginning, "Do you remember?" or "Do you know?"

"They are dainty little things. I know you'd like them. I'll bring you the photographs some day," he went on.

How delightful! So there was to be a "some day" to look forward to.

Neither of these young people was saying any thing remarkable; but they were very much interested in what they said. Tom was handsome, and was making himself agreeable to the dark, slender girl, who looked at him with shy admiring eyes. He liked that better than any fine thing she could have said; and she would not

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

have exchanged him for the most learned man in the world.

"If you don't join us soon," said Gertrude Henderson, looking in and shaking her head at Tom, "I'll punish you! I'll sing 'Silver threads among the golden,' or 'Taking the year together, my dear,' or 'O father, dear father, come home to us now.'" And she looked so handsome and spoke so bewitchingly that Leslie wondered how he could help going to her.

"Or 'Darling, kiss my eyelids down,'" said Bessie, coming in and laughing.

"I can kiss my own eyelids down very well, thank you," said Tom. "If you'll find some darling to kiss them up for me in the morning, I'll be much obliged to you."

"Why don't you go back?" said Leslie. "I am taking too much of your time, — you are so kind."

"I'm never kind. I am always selfish, and please myself," said the young fellow, looking down at her. "I stay here because I like to. I don't believe Mr. Cavello thinks I'm very kind."

When little Jasper was shut out of the parlor, he had seated himself at the back of the hall to enjoy the music; and, lulled by it, and soothed

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

by the warmth from the register near him, he nodded off to sleep.

Suddenly he awoke. The music had ceased. The opera cloak and a little hat hung on the rack beside him. He rubbed his eyes, and remembered where he was. Forgetting that he had run off bare-headed, he snatched the hat from the peg, threw the well-known cloak about him, and dashed past the open parlor door at full speed.

Mr. Cavello looked over his shoulder. The flying cape caught his eye, and at the sound of the closing door he sprang from his seat, caught his coat and hat from the hall table, and "slam" went the door behind him.

None of the others had seen Jasper's flight, and so they were all wonder-struck at Mr. Cavello's sudden departure.

"Perhaps there's 'Spanish leave,' as well as 'French leave,'" said Bessie. "Perhaps he couldn't bear to say good-by: some people can't." Then she burst out laughing. It was certainly very funny; and Grace laughed, and they all laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks.

Tom and Leslie came from the back parlor to share the fun. Mr. Cavello was gone, and the

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

family were crying with laughter. No one could explain.

"Mr. Cavello" — said Bessie, and went off into another spasm.

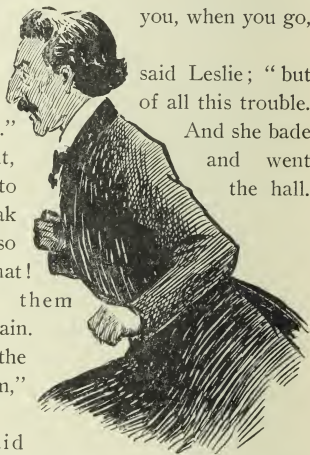
"Mr. Cavello" — said Grace Wentworth, and then words failed her.

"Of all your attendants, Miss Leslie," said Tom, "I am the only one left. You'll let me go home with you, when you go, won't you?"

"Thank you," said Leslie; "but I'm ashamed of all this trouble. I must go now." And she bade them good-night, and went with Bessie into the hall. The opera cloak was gone, — so was Clarence's hat! They sought them everywhere in vain.

"Perhaps the boys took them," said Leslie.

"No," said Tom, "I saw the boys go out. Mr. Cavello, perhaps?"



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"No," said Bessie. "His hat was on the table. He caught it on the wing."

The cloak and hat were nowhere to be found. So Bessie lent Leslie a pink cloud, — oh, how pretty she looked in it! — and a heavy shawl, and Tom opened the door.

There stood Pomp, his white eyes shining.

"The boys ain't come home, nor Jasper ain't come home, an' I was afeard Miss Leslie would n't come with Massa Cavello, so I come along myself."

They told him of the disappearance of the cloak and of Mr. Cavello.

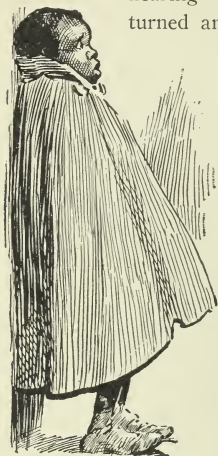
Pomp shook his head: it was too deep for him.

"Now you'll have just the escort you wanted," said Miss Henderson's smooth voice; but Tom said he must go too, to see that every thing was right. He tucked Leslie's hand in his arm, much to the delight of Pomp, who ambled on behind, proud of his darling's conquest.

Mr. Cavello had seen Leslie leave home at dusk, arrayed in the opera cloak and Clarence's hat; and so, when the flying red cape caught his eye in the Doctor's hall, he thought the girl was slipping away from him with his rival, and, his hot blood rising, he flew after her.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

He had hardly run a block, when he saw that the cloak was worn by a boy, and that boy, John Jasper. Jasper was running at full speed; but, hearing quick steps behind, he turned and saw Mr. Cavello making after him.



Terror lent him wings, and on he rushed. What could Mr. Cavello want but to shake him? And that was what Mr. Cavello certainly did want.

Up and down and through narrow streets Mr. Cavello chased the little black boy, who dodged and hid, and finally fled into a dark alley and eluded the enraged lover.

"I'll break every bone into his body," said Mr. Cavello, "when I do catch him!" But he did not catch him!

As he reached the steps



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

of the St. Johns' house from one direction, Tom, Pomp, and Leslie approached from the other. They hung back until he had gone in; and then little Jasper appeared, out of breath and panting, and told how Mr. Cavello had chased him, and he "had n't done nothin'." Jasper wore the cloak and hat, and so it was all explained; and Tom was able to clear up the mystery for the ladies on his return.

Leslie said she should love the Colonel's opera cloak for ever, because it had saved her from Mr. Cavello's escort.



III

TOM had met Leslie many times in the street since the tea-party, and had walked home with her. He thought her the very sweetest girl he had ever seen, but he reflected that often before he had met "the very sweetest girl," and then had changed his mind. "But this is different," said the young fellow to himself: "she seems to belong to me, somehow."

He called on her one afternoon to give her the photographs he had promised. "I have something else," he said. "My friend John Ackerman, who paints so beautifully, has the nicest wife! I'll take you there some day." What, another "some day," thought Leslie. "I took tea with them the other evening, and she gave me two little poems about these very pictures, — they are favorites of hers, it seems, —

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and I have brought them to you. Do you care for verses?"

"Yes," said Leslie, "I like just to say my songs over for the sake of the words. And does Mrs. Ackerman paint, too? I wonder if she loves to make pictures and poetry? I wish you'd ask her some time. I don't know anybody who makes poetry. I'm so sorry in the spring and summer that I can't *say* how lovely it is."

"She does n't call this poetry: she said they were rhymes," said Tom.

"I'd like to paint," said Leslie; "only I'd have to paint splendidly, I suppose, to enjoy it."

"I don't know that. I know an old fellow in town who paints — I could n't say horribly, for the drawing is pretty good, and I've seen worse color; but the very thing that ought to be there is n't there. His landscapes never make me feel

'I have been here before,
But how or when I cannot tell.'

His portraits never make me say

'As if her image in a glass
Had tarried when herself had gone.'

Leslie thought Tom was making it up, quotations and all, and she listened with admiration.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Do people buy the old man's pictures?"

"Oh, once in a while, — often enough to keep him from starving. He lives behind a green baize screen in his studio, which is a forlorn

little room, close under the

roof. He cooks his own food, and mends his own clothes, and sleeps in some kind

of a sofa thing, which he makes up at bed-time.

The artists feel sorry for him.

They help him along; and they

love him, too,

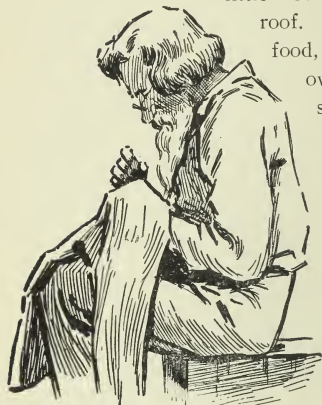
for his enthusiasm. He

thinks next

year and next year he'll be a great painter."

"Isn't it strange," said Leslie, "that he has such enthusiasm for an art he has no genius for!"

"Ackerman says he has talent for business, but he'd rather starve, as a painter, than earn a



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

good income in any other way. He has a patient look on his face that is very touching, — poor old Thompson! I bought a picture of him once, and gave it to a hospital. I hope it did n't harm any of the patients. I've wondered whether each picture disappoints him, or whether he only thinks the world is dull at recognizing genius."

Leslie was touched by this description. "Where does he live?" she asked. "I'll get Uncle to buy some pictures of him, — they'd do for us; — we don't know as much about pictures as you do."

"They would n't answer for you," said Tom. "You are so quick to see beautiful things that they would vex you all the time. You would know a good from a bad picture, I am sure."

Leslie was delighted with the praise. "Well, if we did n't like his landscapes," she said, "Uncle might have the boys' portraits taken, and mine."

"Heaven forbid!" said Tom; and then he laughed to think of the simper which Thompson would invent for Leslie's mouth. "He must have known Susan Fields sometime, I think. I went to school to her when I was a little chap. She wore a long curl behind each ear, and she

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

used to snap me on my head with her thimble. The art-instruction she gave me was that, if I wanted to make a face smile, I must turn the corners of the mouth up; if I wanted a desponding expression, I must turn them down. What stuff!" said Tom, bursting into a laugh at the recollection.

"Your friend Mr. Ackerman gets a great deal of money for his pictures, I suppose," said Leslie: "he paints good portraits, does n't he?"

"Perfect," said Tom. "I'd like to have him paint you. He asked me if he might do so for the Exhibition; but I should n't like to have your face there, for people to make their idiotic comments on."

Tom stopped. What right had he to Leslie's face?

"Why, when did he see me?" asked Leslie, in surprise.

"One day when we were walking. He wants you to come to his studio."

"What could he want me for in a picture?" said Leslie. "Does n't he know Miss Henderson? She's splendid, I think, — she's so handsome."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom could n't help laughing. Ackerman wanted a face for the line,

"I never loved but ain."

Gertrude Henderson! she would be a model for a *genre* picture, in a long-trained French dress, looking over her shoulder into a mirror, or chirping to a parrot in a dainty boudoir.

"You have n't read the verses," said Tom. "Do you see? This young lady in the picture, with her hand over her eyes, is Miss Autumn, killing the flowers. The young gentleman behind is Indian Summer, giving them another chance."

"I like this," said Leslie, reading:—

"The foolish leaves, who long to follow
The southward flitting of the swallow!"

"I like to play that flowers and leaves are alive, and know all that we do, and are sorry and glad, and have friends, and all that."

"Mrs. Ackerman's cousin married Simpson, who painted the fairy picture you liked," said Tom.

"And does his wife paint, too?" asked little Leslie, pitifully. Did all the ladies Tom knew

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

play and paint and write poetry, she asked herself.

"No, she is only bright and helpful to have about," said Tom. "Simpson calls her 'Daily Food.'"

"That's a very nice name to be called," said Leslie. "What does Mr. Ackerman call his wife?"

"I don't know, — Mary, I believe. They don't do their love-making before people, as the Simpsons do. But Ackerman was glad enough to get his wife. I know they had a very romantic story. Mrs. Simpson told it to me."

"I wish you'd read this aloud to me," said Leslie, holding out the verses: —

High up, upon the windy hill,
Swingeth a little Wild-rose still :
None had been seen for many a morn
Till the chill hour when this was born.
It swingeth east, it swingeth west,
It has no time for idle rest,
For never hath a Wild-rose seen
The world in aught save summer green,
And Sumach clump and Maple bough
With autumn's fires are burning now.

To share the Rose's lucky lot,
Blooms the last blue Forget-me-not ;

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

And these two marvel much, I wis,
To see such wondrous sights as this, —
Like drifts of rain-clouds through the sky
The birds at eve go hurrying by;
The bright leaves flutter on the wind,
As ill content to stay behind, —
The foolish leaves, who long to follow
The southward flitting of the swallow !

At eve came Autumn to the hill,
Where swung the little Wild-rose still,
Where bloomed the blue Forget-me-not
Beside it, in a sheltered spot.
Like morning mist they saw her pass,
Nor stepped she on the crisp brown grass.
The West Wind met her coming down,
And flew to bear her trailing gown,
Within whose folds the Summer's fair
Last flowers she bore with tender care, —
The purple Aster wet with dew,
The Goldenrod and Feverfew ;
And gathered spears of golden wheat
From brown wild grasses at her feet.

She droops her head with plaintive grace
To hide her tearful eyes and face,
As deeming that an evil hour
Which marks the blighting of a flower.
Then on the little bloom of blue
A hollow golden cone she threw,
And on the Wild-rose, freshly blown,
Another little golden cone.
She lays her hands across her eyes,
Nor waits to hear their parting sighs.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

As in the sunshine sails the mote,
See Indian Summer idly float —
A baby summer, sweet and fair —
Delicious languors on the air
And keen, fresh odors from the field,
A silvery mist the meadows yield
To veil the hills no longer fair,
And throw o'er all a dreamland air.
His golden rod with certain sway
Uplifts the golden cones away.
"I've slept," said little Rose, "and what
Did'st thou, my dear Forget-me-not?"

A little child went singing by,
In childish treble clear and high,
"Sweet is the day the Lord was born,
And sweet the resurrection morn."
Clearer and clearer trilled her voice,
"'T is the Lord's day, let all rejoice!"
She took the path across the hill, —
"Forget-me-not and Wild-rose still?
O joy! The mill-maid need not go
Without the flowers she longs for so."

The little maiden in the mill
Lay on her bed so white and still, —
So white and still, she well might seem
A moonlight maiden in a dream.
"Forget-me-not and love's own red!
The Lord hath sent them me," she said.
When the last light had left the west,
The dead flowers lay on her dead breast.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Now read the other," said Leslie. "It is lovely to know the story of a picture. Does its name mean twilight, did you say?"

Tom read on. What is more delightful than an audience of one, when that one is a pretty girl with soft, dark eyes?

Tom looked up once in a while to see if Leslie was listening.

Before the little candle's light
Had showed the darkness of the night,
When slowly home, in full content,
The cows through herby pastures went,
The little herd-girl saw a sight
Which filled her with a strange delight:
The grassy hill rose black and high
On the pale background of the sky;
There like a fire of glowing red
The scarlet Poppy waved its head;
There, when the air was dead and still,
In village streets below the hill,
The little breezes danced all night,
And frolicked in the still moonlight.
She saw, as in a magic boat,
The Spirit of the Twilight float;
Clear on her brow, she saw the fair
White star of evening gleaming there,
Her fluttering mantle folded tight,
To cheat the chilly dews of night.
A North Wind, fiercely rushing there,
Had sought to bear her through the air
He caught her in his rude embrace,
And showered wild kisses on her face.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Then came an East Wind, sweeping down
From wearied sick folk in the town ;
He tore her mantle wide apart,
And strove to chill her glowing heart.
A West Wind to her rescue flew,
But what could he between the two ?
A wind in silence from the south
Laid tender kisses on her mouth,
Her trembling limbs he closer drew,
Round her his warm, strong arms he threw,
And, folded in a close embrace,
With heart to heart and face to face,
They floated till the black of night
Had shut the star-gleam from her sight.
The little maiden, shy with awe,
Told not her mother what she saw ;
And, when the next morn shed its gleam,
She smiled, and thought it all a dream.
A painter, sketching in the shade,
Held converse with the little maid,
And from his glowing colors drew
This picture, beautiful as true.
With quiet face and earnest eyes,
The child looked on in still surprise.
So wonderful a thing it seemed
To paint the colors she had dreamed.

Then one who loved the picture well
Sought in a simple rhyme to tell
(As tints reflected in a pool)
The story of La Crépuscule.

Oh, what a voice Tom had ! It was made on
purpose to read poetry with, Leslie thought.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

She pinned the photographs on the wall of her room, and learned the verses by heart.

Some time after this, Tom took Leslie to the studio. It was in Mr. Ackerman's house. Oh, such a beautiful house! The doorways were curtained, and there were china plates on the wall. That almost made Leslie laugh. The furniture had tiles set in it, and it was painted beautifully, and looked just as if it belonged to the house, — as indeed it did. Mr. Ackerman had designed every piece.

Leslie had never been in a studio before, and she was delighted with the old furniture, the rugs and tapestry, the vases, and all the odd things which made up the orderly disorder.

And Mrs. Ackerman was so lovely, — no, not lovely, — so charming. She took the young girl around the room, and told her about the pretty things, and made her forget herself altogether.

She "gauged" Leslie, as she called it, with a little portfolio of pictures. Leslie nodded as she turned them over, and said, "That's lovely!" or "Oh, how pretty!" At last, Mrs. Ackerman came to a picture of a wide plain without a tree. On the far horizon the great moon was rising. A shepherd followed by his flock was

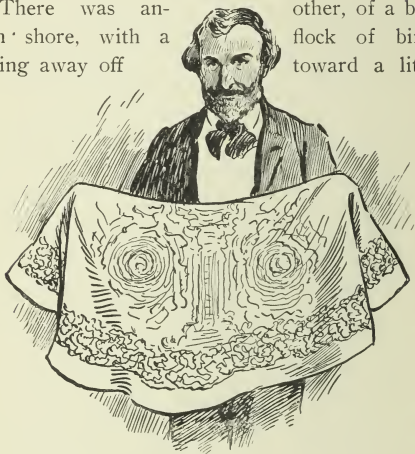
The Colonel's Opera Cloak

going toward the moon. There was very little color in the picture.

"Oh!" said Leslie, with a long-drawn sigh; and she looked up with brightening eyes at Mrs. Ackerman.

There was an-
ren' shore, with a
flying away off

other, of a bar-
flock of birds
toward a little



sunlight which gleamed through the gray clouds; and one, of a pure sky, and apple-trees in blossom. These were Leslie's favorites.

While Mr. Ackerman was showing Leslie his

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

old-fashioned costumes, Mrs. Ackerman took Tom into her cozy corner.

"She is sweet and sincere," she said. "I hope you'll bring her again. I covet her face for one of John's pictures. I tested her with my gauging portfolio, and she bore it bravely. It was a pleasure to see the child divine the best things; and she has never seen pictures, you say?"

"No," said Tom, "but she seems intuitively to choose the best in every thing."

"Does she?" said Mrs. Ackerman, laughing.

Tom wanted to kiss her, he was so grateful to her. Leslie little knew why he sang his friend's praises all the way home.



IV

THE winter passed on, enlivened by various events in the family on Margrave Street.

“What about the St. Johns now?” was often the question, at tea-time, at the Doctor’s. The St. Johns were always getting into trouble; and they dragged the Douglas family into it, in one way or another.

The boys “made believe” go to school, but played truant half the time. Work of any sort was not for the noble young scions of a house of the “Chivalry.” Until a royal road to learning was discovered, learning was relegated to “muckers,” as these young gentlemen styled the Northern boys.

Living in the streets as they did, it was little wonder that they made strange acquaintances. A great lazy fellow, seeing how freely they threw

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

away money, once urged them into a partnership in a pop-beer and peanut stand. When Leslie found it out, she cried; but Mrs. St. John laughed. It struck her like a prank of young princes.

"They 'll only lose money. They won't make a cent," she said, as if the only harm could be in making money.

Arthur St. John complimented little Ned Douglas by confiding to him some coarse yellow and green handbills, with instructions to ride in the different horse-cars, and to hand the bills to the passengers and throw them from the windows. He was to spend his own money for fares, and take his pay in pop-beer and peanuts, so the "pardner" suggested.

The stand was in one of the business streets; and "Jim Kelly" turned many a penny, while the St. John boys had only the excitement and the peanuts.

Tom saw his little brother one day standing on a corner, giving away handbills. He took him by the ear, and walked him into a doorway.

"You little villain!" said he, reading one of the bills, "what are you up to? Did n't I tell

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

you not to play with those St. John boys, nor to go to their house?"

"You go there yourself," whined little Ned, wriggling out of his big brother's clutches. "You go to see Leslie yourself! The boys say you do. But Mr. Cavello's going to take her away. She won't have you! Let me go!"

"What do you think mother will say to you? I fancy that the spanking days are not over yet, my young friend," said Tom, with unnecessary fervor. "Come with me!"

Tom made Ned give the handbills to Mr. Kelly, of the pop-beer stand, and paid him a quarter for the peanuts the young "drummer" had taken out for pay.

"Let me see your license!" said he.

The big fellow was scared, and confessed that he had none.

"If this is n't shut up to-morrow, I'll see you in court, my friend," said Tom.

When the St. Johns, with mouths prepared for peanuts, joyfully repaired to the corner the next morning, the stand, the boy, the pop-beer, peanuts and handbills had vanished like a vision of the night.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

One day Pomp appeared at the Doctor's, with a large tray containing a Southern breakfast, — hoe-cake, hominy and bacon.

"Missus sends her compl'ments," said the old fellow. "She ain't very well. She's an infidel sometimes. No, not 'zackly an infidel, neither. She gits well mostly when dare's new dresses, or suthin' goin' on, or de Colonel comes home. I cooked dis on purpose for yer."

Pomp had brought the waiter through the streets uncovered, with the Colonel's opera cloak, which was hooked round his neck, flapping its red wings on either side as he walked, like a great flamingo.



Bessie wondered how they had lived before the St. Johns came to enliven their dull days. The Southern breakfast was set on the sideboard for Tom, as a sample of what Leslie's husband would have to eat.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"It's about time for another scene," said Bessie, one afternoon. "I wonder what they're getting up now!"

One morning, not long after this, Leslie came to the house, all trembling and tearful, to see Mrs. Douglas.

Clarence was lost! He had taken his breakfast about ten o'clock the morning before; for Leslie remembered stepping over him as he was eating it on the stairs. They hardly wondered when he didn't come in to dinner; but when tea-time came, and no Clarence, the family were alarmed.

Pomp had gone out and asked everybody he met; but nobody had seen Clarence. He went to a policeman, who said the boy would probably be at home by the time he got back. "Lost boys are always found at home," he said. Leslie had sat up all night, and Pomp had been to all the police stations, and her aunt was almost crazy; and would n't Mrs. Douglas please, please come to see her?

Mrs. Douglas was very sorry for them. They were so shiftless that she yearned over them: so shiftless that it was pathetic.

She hurried on her bonnet, and went with

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie, first sending little Ned with a note to Tom's office.

In a short time, Tom appeared at Mrs. St. John's, with a morning paper. He had just seen this item:—

“Yesterday, toward night, a man discovered the body of a child in the water, by a lumber pile near Libby's Wharf. It was that of a boy about nine years old. He was apparently dead. His clothing was not marked. He wore a mixed gray suit, odd shoes and stockings. One was a man's stocking marked with a stencil, the name nearly illegible. It looked like Cavetto. The boy wore a long blue cape, lined with red, fastened with gilt clasps. It had probably buoyed him up when he fell through the ice. He was taken to the City Hospital.”

Mrs. St. John went into hysterics. Mrs. Douglas and Pomp had their hands full with her.

Tom and Leslie set out for the hospital. Leslie wanted to run, but Tom called a carriage.

She sat in the superintendent's office while Tom made inquiries. He came back in a minute, smiling.

“The little scamp is alive!” he said.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie caught his hand and kissed it over and over, much to the embarrassment of the little old gentleman, with a plaid neck-tie, who sat at the desk, his stiff white hair parted behind, and peeping over each ear as if to spy what he was writing.

Tom took Leslie to Clarence, and then rushed back to carry the good news.

Clarence was cross. He would n't let Leslie kiss him.

"What did you put me here for?" he asked faintly. "I don't like this big bedroom. I'd rather be home when I'm sick."

"My darling!" said Leslie, with tears in her eyes, "I have come to take you home. I did n't put you here. O Clarence, why did you run away? Auntie is sick: she thinks you are dead. Mr. Douglas has gone home to tell her that you are alive, and to make her well. Did n't you know you'd been almost drowned?"

"No," said Clarence. "Was I? I knew I went skating. I've been asleep for a good while, and when I woke up I was afraid, here. I thought maybe I was dead, and this was the way they did in heaven."

The doctor said Clarence must not be moved

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

for a day or two, and that Leslie might stay with him all the afternoon.

Leslie held his hand, and whispered stories to him, and hummed her songs so sweetly and softly that Clarence soon fell into a deep sleep.

Tom made Bessie laugh at dinner. "Mrs. St. John was like the affectionate mother of the 'Lost Heir,' " he said. "She got on her dignity at once when she found Clarence was not dead, and said she should n't speak to him for a week for giving her such a fright, and she should write to his father to have him put in the Reform School; and he should be whipped well for this; and that Leslie, who had nothing to do but to look after the boys, should find, to her cost, that this carelessness was not to be overlooked."

"Was n't it funny," added Tom, "that 'O. C. St. John, Esq.,' as Bessie calls the opera cloak, led to his discovery? I forgot, for a minute, that the boy was supposed to be dead, and roared, when I saw that in the paper! And there the cloak was, hanging over the hospital cot like a guardian angel with folded wings."

"And was it Mr. Cavello's stocking he had on?" asked Bessie.

"Of course," said Tom. "My only wonder

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

is that that family don't invent some way to exchange heads."

As if it was not enough for Leslie and Tom to be in love, or on the way to it; and for poor Mr. Cavello to be tearing his hair, as it were; and for Gertrude Henderson to be tearing Leslie's, so to speak, — poor little Arthur must needs take his turn, and fall in love with Bessie, who was five years older than he. He brought her presents, he made pretty little speeches. Poor Arthur! He was a handsome, attractive boy; but he could not "tell time," and he spoke of "Hug Miller," in the Game of Authors, to little Ned's horror.

One day he sent Bessie a parrot in a beautiful gilt cage, and a lovely turquoise ring.

"This is getting serious," said Bessie, laughing. "The boy has taken to coming to church, and he glares at any one who speaks to me. I thought he'd call Deacon Watson out for a duel, when he shook hands with me in the aisle."

Jasper appeared one day with a note from Arthur, spelled horribly, requesting Bessie to go to a "conciert" with him. Jasper was to

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

wait for an answer. He stood eating a russet apple, and holding a red one in his hand.

"What a beautiful apple you have there!" said Mrs. Douglas, amusing herself with the boy. "Do you like red or brown apples best?"

"Well," said Jasper, looking very solemn, as if he had a most important question to decide, "I loves de brown best. De red apple is de puttiest; but yer put yer teef into it, it squizzles up yer mouf; but yer puts yer teef into de brown apple, an' yer keeps on puttin' yer teef in. Dese red apples is like some folks, — dey charms de eye, but dere is n't nothin' in 'em! Dese brown apples, dey's like oder folks, — dey ain't so smarted up, but dey's good inside."



Mrs. Douglas laughed outright. She remem-

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

bered Jasper's moralizing at the front door on her first call at the St. Johns'.

"And do you like living in the North or South best?" she asked.

"Well," said the boy solemnly, "as fur as watermillions goes, I likes de Souf best; but as fur as de mince-pie goes, dat you give me one day, I likes de Norf best."

Mrs. Douglas sent for some mince-pie immediately. Such a delicate hint and so fine a compliment must be rewarded.

"Do you ever go to school, Jasper?" inquired Mrs. Douglas, while he was busy with the engaging pie, which had so endeared the North to him.

"Oh, yes, Missus," he replied. "I goes putty reg'lar. I draws picters in a book some days."

"What sort of pictures?"

"Well, de teacher gives 'em to us. We's done de pumps an' coffins, an' now we's on de wine-glass. I larns, too, about de speres, de moon an' de stars. De sun is a yeller ball, yer know, an' it's ketched on to de globe wid a good strong wire, an' de moon ain't so big, an' is white, an' is ketched on wid anoder wire."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Do you understand about the real sun and earth and moon better, since you learned that?"

"What, Missus?"

"Do you understand that the globe is made like this world you live on, only a great, great deal smaller?"

"Oh, no, Missus," said Jasper; and then he added, rather surprised at Mrs. Douglas's stupidity: "We don't live on de globe, yer know. We could n't, — 'tain't no bigger dan dat," circling his arms. "Massy gracious! my gran'-fa's two feet would cover de world all up, ef it wa' n't no bigger dan a globe."

Then, feeling that he had exhausted Mrs. Douglas's capacity in globes, he went on to arithmetic: —

"I larns, ef a boy hes five chestnuts in one han', an' two chestnuts in de oder han', how many chestnuts does dat boy hev? Onswer, seven chestnuts.

"Ef Mary hes seven apples, an' Susan hes free apples, how many hes dey bof' togedder? Onswer, ten apples.

"Ef John hes twelve alleys, — no, morbles, — an'" — He was evidently going straight down

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

the page, when Bessie appeared with a note, and he rushed off.

The next time Mrs. Douglas met Mrs. St. John, she said to her that she was afraid she did not know how Arthur was wasting his money. He bought such expensive presents for Bessie that it made them feel very uncomfortable, and they must return them to him.

"Oh, don't!" said Mrs. St. John: "the poor boy would feel so bad; and I'm sure it's a very innocent way to spend money. I'm only glad he had sense to buy things like that."

As the Colonel's land had hung on his hands of late, he had had very little money to send home, and yet the boys had been more lavish than usual. Unfortunately, they had bought ice-cream, guns and parlor-skates instead of clothes; and Clarence was now obliged to stay in for want of shoes.

One day there was not a mouthful to eat in the house. The week before they had lived on "turkey and tart, and on chine, chine, chine." Pomp had now no meal to make a hoe-cake, — so "they had to let the hoe-cake be."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

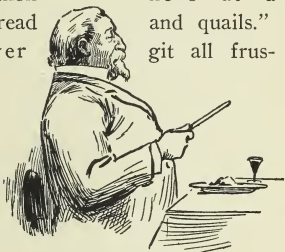
The morning mail brought no check from the Colonel. Mrs. St. John was getting cross.

"Come, Pomp," said she, "what are you going to do now? We've got to eat, I suppose, if the Colonel does think we can wait day after day for our meals. I reckon he's at a club, eating sweetbread and quails."

"Oh, don't yer git all frustered," said Pomp.

"I'll git yer a nice brekfust putty soon. Things ain't goin' hard, Miss Marie, yer 'se only hungry."

Pomp had a trick of his own by which to raise money.



Toward dusk the next night, Tom was hurrying home from his office, when a queer figure creeping along in the shadow caught his eye. There was a natural and an unnatural look about it. He went closer; and the man, feeling an eye upon him, shrunk into the area of a house. Tom passed on, and, turning the next corner, waited a few minutes. Soon the man came in sight, and in the light of the street-lamp Tom saw a

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

cringing Jew enveloped in the Colonel's opera cloak.

Tom dashed at it as if he was rescuing "a man and a brother," and demanded of the Jew where he had got the cloak. The little man, frightened almost to death, said it was his. Tom demanded again how he came by it, when Mr. Isaaks confessed that he had had it so often in his pawn-shop, with other things from the same place, that he had come to look on it as one of the family. He had just stepped out for a moment to commune with nature before supper, little dreaming what his sad fate was to be.

Tom let him go, and followed him home and paid the amount due, and sent the Colonel's opera cloak to its owners by a boy, with directions to leave it on the steps and ring the bell.

Tom would have laughed to see its reception by the St. Johns. Pomp opened the door. The cloak lay on the steps, like a lost lamb come back to the fold, or a prodigal son, or a shipwrecked mariner.

"Oh, massy gracious!" said Pomp, bearing it into the family circle in the front parlor, where all the gas-lights were blazing, and the shades were still raised.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Massy gracious, Miss Leslie, what yer tink? Dat ar op'ra cloak's done come ob hisself; paid his own pawn-ticket, an' done rung de bell! I see his brass knobs a-wigglin' when I opened de do'. De days ob de mir'cles am returned."



Little Clarence ran to the old friend, with open arms.

"O you dear opera cloak! I wanted you awful bad to-day," he cried, with delight.

"De op'ra cloak done come back, Missus," shouted little Jasper, running into the back parlor, with white eyes shining. "My gran'fa' done see him walk up de steps, an' ring de do', an' walk in de parlor, good as anybody! 'Pears like he was a gent'man come to call."

Even Leslie was glad: she always felt disgraced when their things were in pawn. But she wished they could put Mr. Cavello in pawn, and lose the ticket.



V

SOMETIMES when Leslie visited Bessie, Tom walked home with her through Paradise and the Elysian Fields, called by other people Margrave Street and Montgomery Avenue.

One night they went five blocks too far, by mistake. They laughed, and turned, only to walk as much too far the other way; and then they woke out of the dream-land in which they had been so aimlessly wandering, and looked for numbers, and discussed the merits of high-stooped and basement houses, and over-ground and under-ground railways.

It mattered little to them. Few steps or many, under-ground and over-ground cars, carried them at lightning speed into a fairy-land, where the meanest things were set about with halos, and "Love, like snow, made all unseemly things seem fair."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom wanted to take Leslie to a concert. Her face had lighted up so brightly at Gertrude Henderson's fine music, and softened so sweetly at Grace Wentworth's, that he wanted to see her enjoy Thomas's orchestra and the Glee-Club singing.

He stood in his room, lost in thought, smoking away at an unlighted cigar.

"There never was a girl so sweet as Leslie, — never, by George!" said the handsome young fellow, bringing his hand down upon the mantel-piece. "I'll take her there. But, then, I suppose she'd wear one slipper and a cavalry-boot, a silk waist and a petticoat; a stove-pipe hat and a white veil, one mit and a fur glove; and, over all, the Colonel's opera cloak! Dear little Leslie, she'd look like a pink, even then, I believe."

It gave Tom a twinge, however, to think of placing Leslie near Gertrude Henderson, or any of his fashionable friends; not because he was ashamed of her, I truly believe, but because he remembered Leslie's quick blushes when things were amiss in her dress or about the house.

"I know!" said Tom. "I'll take her to drive, and it won't be round the park either, but out into the country and through by-way and

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

highway. 'Things must be getting summerish by this time in the country.'

Tom had discovered a new way of going home from his office. He went twelve blocks too far up town, and across two avenues, in order to pass Leslie's house. He laughed at himself, and called it his "short cut."

Leslie learned to watch for him.

He rarely came to call, but she counted the day lost when she did not bow to him from the parlor window; and Tom felt despondent about his business, if he missed her face from between the dingy lace curtains; and then his kind mother would say to her boy, when she saw the shadow on his face, —

"No one ever got a great practice at once. You are doing as well as any young lawyer."

Poor woman! One look from Leslie's shy eyes would have proved better comfort.

One day, while Tom was taking his "short cut," it occurred to him to make a call on Leslie, and set a day for a drive.

Pomp ushered him into the parlor, and went to call Leslie. She was behind the curtains, watching for Tom. She ventured forth when Pomp had shut the door.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Poor old Pomp! He did n't come back. He had seen her hiding in the curtains; he only laughed to himself. "I reckons Miss Leslie's done fotch Massa Tom! He do' 'no' ef his head or his heels am de place fur to walk on," he said.

Leslie was delighted at the idea of the drive. Oh, she had wanted so to see the country! She was always homesick in the city; and even in the North there must be some blossoms now, or, at least, a little green grass.

Her life was a dull one; and she looked on Tom as a kind angel, who had promised her a day's trip to heaven.

When the day came, it was rather "misty-moisty." Tom sought the family opinion about the weather so earnestly, at breakfast, that they asked if he was going to a balloon ascension.

"Whiles I thinks it will rain, and whiles I thinks it won't," said Bessie, in broad Irish, mimicking old Dennis.

Tom kept his own counsel. He felt instinctively that Gertrude Henderson would be more kindly looked on than shy little Leslie, by the family, even for a drive.

The sun came out in the afternoon. Tom

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

appeared at Mrs. St. John's with a smart buggy and a fine horse.

Leslie had borrowed her aunt's bonnet. Mrs. St. John was quite cheerful at this advance on Tom's part. She almost offered her red India shawl.

"Now, Miss Leslie," said Pomp, who had gone out to hold the horse, "yer ain't got 'nuf on, ef it comes on rainin'. Yer wait tell I fotch de Colonel's op'ra cloak."

Tom almost demurred. "O. C. St. John, Esq.," had acquired such a personality at the Doctor's, that he was inclined to look on it as a spy. He felt as if one of the family had been forced on him. He expected Pomp to bring out the three young cousins, Mrs. St. John, and Mr. Cavello, next.

Mrs. St. John waved her handkerchief from the parlor, while Pomp was seeking for the cloak in all its accustomed haunts. The boys balanced themselves out of a window.

"Hallo, Leslie! Going to ride with a young man! ho, ho, ho, ho! Good-by, Mrs. Douglas, — good-by." And little Jasper's "te, he," was heard above their voices.

Pomp laid the cloak over Leslie's feet, and the

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

two young people drove off with flushed cheeks. Leslie was almost crying with shame.

After they passed the city limits, they came into the well-kept roads of the suburbs.

"How should you like to live in one of those houses?" asked Tom, pointing to a Gothic villa, with flower-beds laid out like a puzzle.

"Oh!" said Leslie, "I can't bear that kind. How dreadful it would be to walk round that garden in and out, back and forth, up and down. It ought to have a whipping-post, a pillory, and the Mansion of Happiness in the middle."

"I don't like it, either," said Tom, though he had thought it lovely a moment before, and had put Leslie in the door-way, and was walking up the path himself, all in the flash of an eye; but now this dream faded as quickly as it had arisen.

"Show me the kind of house you like," said he.

After they had passed through the long covered bridge, under which the river was roaring and tumbling over its rocky bed, they reached the country; and there Leslie found houses to her mind, — old farm-houses, with sloping roofs; large family mansions, with walled gardens, and elms on the lawns.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

The little saxifrage was thick along the road, — “pussy-foot” Leslie called it. She got out to gather some, and Tom had to lift her down. They took no time to notice the black clouds which were scudding rapidly over the heavens.

Tom had hardly helped Leslie into the carriage, when large drops began to fall.

“We are very near a hotel now,” said he, — “one you will like. It is called the Half-Way House, and kept in real country fashion.”

The rain was pouring in torrents when they drove into the stable. A woman came out, and led Leslie through a covered passage into the house.

“It is only an April shower,” said she. “I’ll warm you, and by that time it will be over.”

There were long tables in the dining-hall, well filled on court and cattle-show days, when the Governor and other great men made speeches.

In the little sitting-room was an open fire, and here Tom ordered tea. A stern hair-cloth sofa filled one side of the room. “Excuse me,” one would almost say before sitting on it.

“I wish the fellow who cursed mankind with

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

hair-cloth was forced to eat it all," said Tom, eying the sofa.

Leslie laughed.

"I wish our boys had one to jump on," she said: "it would be better than red satin for them."

Over the high mantel-piece, "Wide Awake" and "Fast Asleep" woke and slumbered.

"I suppose it's safe to say," said Tom, "that there is n't a spot in this wide world unblessed by at least one of those pictures. As the poet says, —

‘The sea, the lone dark sea hath one,’

and again,

‘Two are in the church-yard laid,
And two in Conway dwell.’”

Tom looked around.

"Where's 'God bless our Home'? Bessie's afraid to marry, for fear that motto will be given her. Here it is; and 'Love one Another,' — that's good; and 'Welcome,' — that's pleasant."

Leslie wished he would n't make fun of every thing. She did n't dare to admire any thing except skies, flowers, and music. She had the best of Tom there.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

They sat by the fire in the easy-chairs with the bright patch cushions, — the chairs which almost rocked themselves, — while tea was being served on the large light-stand.

It seemed doubly pleasant, from the rain and wind outside. That would only last through this delightful tea: the woman had said it was only a shower.

So Leslie smiled and beamed and laughed at every thing Tom said; and she toasted the bread a little more, and told Tom if he did n't eat his crusts she should put them on a high shelf for his breakfast; and Tom thought what a jolly thing it would be to have Leslie always at a little table, laughing at him and warming his toast.

Leslie said the tea was that horrid English breakfast tea which tasted like hay; but Tom said it was nectar, — he always knew he should be able to tell the thing when he met it; and he found ambrosia in the smoked beef omelet.

Leslie said he might put his elbow on the table, and spread jelly on his bread, and sing, and sit in his rocking-chair while he supped, because this nice little time was "just for once."



Arthur. E. Becher. 1892

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom's spirits drooped for a minute, and then he fortified himself with a "We'll see."

The opera cloak hung on a chair by the fire. Tom felt rebuked that he had not asked it to "draw up" and "take a bite."

When tea was over, Leslie sat in her chair by the fire, and sang the little songs which seemed to belong to her. The light shone through her flossy hair, and made a halo about her pretty head. She said she wished she could "purr."

The old clock in the hall struck six. The rain was driving as heavily as ever. The woman came in to bring more wood, and Leslie rather reproached her for the storm, — "You said it would be over after tea."

The woman laughed. "Folks always look for showers in April," she said; "but this has set in for the night, the men-folks seem to think."

"Then we ought to go now," said Leslie, rising and taking a longing look at the fire. "I hope I sha'n't spoil my bonnet," she added.

The buggy was soon at the door. Tom had pulled up the boot, and had borrowed a thick robe.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie lamented over her bonnet so much, that the kind-hearted woman lent her a cloud, which Tom was to return with the robe, and put the bonnet into a box, and stowed it safely under the seat.

The last dim light of day had faded in the west; and before they had gone far the black night was upon them. The wind blew furiously. They could not see one step before them.

The roads were running rivers, and the rain had dug deep gulleys by the road-side, into which the wheels would slip now and then, and nearly upset the carriage.

"Do you know the road?" asked Leslie, in a whisper.

"Oh, yes. I've been here dozens of times." But Tom was rather inclined to think that knowledge was of little avail in this darkness.

After they had gone slowly along for an hour the horse was thrown suddenly upon his haunches, and the carriage gave a terrible lurch. A crash was heard, and a deep voice: "Vot you vant here, runnin' indo beobles dis vay? Git out!"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

The horse groaned and fell. Tom held the reins with his right hand, and Leslie with his left.

"Don't be frightened," he said; "I'll lift you out;" which he did, and set her ankle-deep in a puddle.

He and the German who had collided with him held a consultation.

"Ve can't do som'thin' vidout light," said the man, "and I ton't see no housen."

"I'm leaning against a fence," said Leslie, to announce her discovery. "Perhaps there's a house behind it. I will see."

Tom was sitting on the horse's head to keep him down; the German was righting the buggy.

Leslie felt along the fence, and soon touched a gate-latch. She found a gravel path, and, stepping carefully along, she at last stumbled upon a house, and called out triumphantly that she had found one.

She pounded on the door, — perfect silence. Again she pounded; and at last kicked with her stout boots, — Clarence's boots, rather.

Then she heard steps: the door rattled, and she was dazzled by a light in her face, which

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

an old woman in a night-gown and ruffled cap held over her head.

The old woman looked blankly into the darkness.

"We have lost our way," said Leslie's voice, out of the night, "and our horse is dying, and a man has run into us, and we want some help."

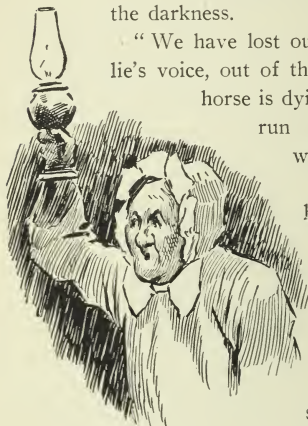
After the woman had recovered from her surprise, she lowered the light, and looked Leslie over.

"Come in," she said, at last.

"I'll wake up my old man, and git him out. We just come back from visitin' my darter-in-law, and we felt sort o' wore out, and went off to bed early."

Leslie ran back to tell Tom that help was coming.

When she returned to the house, the old



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

woman had roused her husband, who, being deaf, did not start fair on the subject.

"Whose horse did you say?"

"I dunno, — a strange horse."

"Oh, a strayed horse, — strayed into the garden-patch?"

"And there's a man and a woman!"

"Oh! a man. I thought you said a horse."

"And a woman."

"Oh! I thought you said a man. Was she afoot?"

The old woman brought another light, and, seeing Leslie shiver, she kindled a little fire in the kitchen stove, and made her put her feet on the hearth. She asked her a thousand questions: what the man's name was, and where he was "settin' out for;" as if he was an emigrant train.

Leslie told her their names, and where they lived, and answered all her questions.

The old woman was delighted with her visitor, offered her some mince-pie, and was hurt when Leslie declined eating it.

"'Tain't made with dried apples," she said, as if Leslie had insinuated that it was.

The man came back for another lantern.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Is the horse dead?" Leslie screamed anxiously to him.

"No, marm, he was only skeert a little. Nothin' ain't the matter with nothin'."

"Ain't you afeard," asked the old woman, "to go through the long bridge agin? It's putty rickety in the daytime; and it ain't no better by night, I can tell you. Folks says — though I don't know as it's trew — there's burglars about there, and murderin' a-goin' on nights. You remember them little narrer winders 'long the sides, don't you?"

"Yes;" Leslie remembered them.

"Well, they say how they robs 'em o' their bosom-pins and chains, and then throws 'em out o' them winders."

Leslie's eyes opened with fright.

"I have n't any jewelry," she said. "I wonder if they'll believe me."

"Oh, I guess so," said the old woman, encouragingly. "I never heard that they did n't believe folks."

Tom came in.

"We're all ready, Miss Leslie. Nothing was broken, and we shall go on very well, now."

Tom borrowed the old man's lantern, and

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie held it at arm's length above her head, while Tom drove.

The horse walked carefully along. Tom laughed at Leslie's fears of the bridge: he had been through it at all hours of the day and the night, and had never even heard of a murder there; and so she was quieted. But those were solemn moments, going through the covered bridge. "Thump, thump, thump," went the horse's echoing feet. It seemed as if he were in a tread-mill, going over and over the same ground.

Leslie held Tom's sleeve all the time, and drew a sigh of relief when the "thump, thump," was deadened on solid ground.

It was ten by this time, and they had yet some way to go.

"I shall never forgive myself," said Tom, "for the discomfort and fright I have given you, and I'll never forget what a brave girl you were, to hunt up that house in the dark. Most girls would have fainted, or sat down and cried. I took Gertrude Henderson out once, and she fainted when the horse ran a little, though I never lost control of him. It is a comfort to see such a brave girl as you."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie's heart was flying with happiness.

"Oh, don't say you are sorry you took me. The drive out was beautiful, and the lovely little tea I shall remember for ever. I never had such a good time in my life. I was just as happy as I wanted to be for once; and to-morrow even this will be funny to laugh about."

"I'm afraid you'll take cold," said Tom, in a tone that was rapidly becoming tender.

"Oh, no, I sha'n't. I never take cold," said Leslie. "I am so strong, nobody ever thinks about me, or takes care that I don't get cold."

"I know somebody who thinks about you, and who likes to take care of you."

"Oh, yes, — Pomp," said Leslie, innocently; and then it flashed across her that he meant himself; but that couldn't be. And Tom thought he had said too much, and would vex her, and so was silent. They rode along slowly, letting the horse take his own pace.

It was eleven when they reached Mrs. St. John's. Tom nearly carried Leslie up the wet steps. Pomp was watching, and opened the door at the sound of their feet. Then Tom brought in the bonnet-box, held Leslie's hand one long second, said "good-night," and was off.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Pomp softly closed the door, and motioned to Leslie to take off her boots, and tiptoe after him to the kitchen. There he had a cup of coffee for her, and made her put her feet in hot water, while she related the incidents of the drive.

He suddenly struck a tragic attitude: "Miss Leslie! Whar's de Colonel's op'ra cloak?"

"Gracious, Pomp, I don't know! We had such a warm robe, and Mr. Tom would wrap it so close around me, that I never thought of the cloak. I know we started with it. I must have dropped it when the carriage tipped over. What will Aunt Marie say?"

"Jus' yer say nuffin, honey; only leave it to me," said Pomp, rolling his white eyes, and looking as wise as an owl. "I'll tend to de op'ra cloak!"

What dreams Leslie had that night! She waded through rivers, and climbed mountains; but Tom was always by, to help her; and his voice was ringing in her ears when she awoke the next morning. She could praise him to Pomp, — that was a comfort!

When Tom reached home, the family were in bed. At breakfast, he said that he went out

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

of town in the afternoon. Luckily, a plate fell and was broken, at that minute, and the conversation turned from him and his affairs.

Endless were the demands, the next two days, for the Colonel's opera cloak. Pomp was indefatigable in searching for it. He went under beds, and in his pretended zeal peered under the bureaus and wardrobe.

"Don't be a fool, Pomp," said Mrs. St. John, peevishly, "looking where you could n't squeeze it. You'd better look in your mouth next!"

When Pomp was alone with Mrs. St. John, he hinted mysteriously that Mr. Cavello "might tell suthin', ef he keerd to, 'bout dat op'ra cloak. When niggers set up for gent'men, nobody could n't never tell what dey'd would n't do to oder folks's op'ra cloaks!"

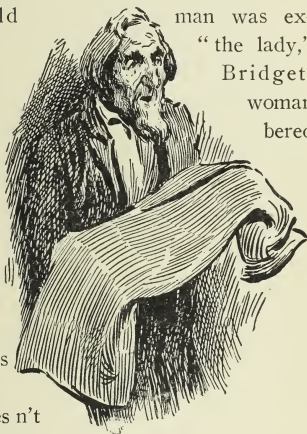
"What do you mean, Pomp, opening your eyes at me like great cups and saucers?" said Mrs. St. John, who did not mind a word more or less, to strengthen a simile.

Pomp only shut his mouth tightly, and shook his head very hard, and would not say any more.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

The third day after the drive, Mrs. Douglas saw the queerest market-wagon in front of her door, and heard a strange voice parleying with the servant who had answered the bell.

She stepped into the hall. An old man was explaining to her as he called that his had remembered where the young gentleman lived, and he had brought home his cape; and he held out to her the Colonel's opera cloak.



into the man was explaining
“the lady,”
Bridget,
woman
bered

“This does n't belong here,” said Mrs. Douglas. “Where did you get it?”

The old man related in great detail how the young lady knocked at his door, and how he thought it was a hoss that had got into the sass-garden; and how she had come in, and he had

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

gone out; and how the young gentleman sat on the hoss's head, and how, after they had gone, his woman wished she'd made 'em stay all night; and how in the morning he'd found the gentleman's red cape lying by his fence; and how a bush had kept it from the rain and mud, — pretty well for a bush; and how his wife had wanted him to fetch it home that day, and how he could n't, because his hoss had to be shoed, and he'd had a stiff neck himself the next day, and this was the fust time he'd had a chance, and how that they must n't think strange onto it.

He took it so thoroughly for granted that Mrs. Douglas knew all about the affair, that she had to ravel his story to get the right of it. She thought that "the gentleman" must have been Mr. Cavello, and could not imagine how the old man had hit upon her house.

"Was it a very dark gentleman?" she asked.

"Oh, no, ma'am, — a light young man, with a reddish moustache and blue eyes, I should say; but it was ruther dark to tell eyes."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Douglas, light dawning upon her, — "I understand. The cloak does

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

not belong here. I'll tell you where to take it." And she sent him to the house on Margrave Street.

Mr. Cavello was standing on the steps, drawing on his gloves. The old man took it for granted that this was his house.

"I've fetched your cape home," he said.

"Oh," said Mr. Cavello. "Where have you found it?"

"Under a bush," said the old fellow. "It wa'n't spoilt at all, now, was it?"

"No. I will give you a dollar, if you shall tell me where you have found it." For nothing had been heard for the last two days but lamentations over the opera cloak.

The old man went carefully over the details again, not omitting the stiff neck, and what "I said," and what "my woman said."

Mr. Cavello's blood was up. Here was the pretty girl whom he wanted to marry slipping off to drive with the Doctor's young puppy.

He threw the cloak to Pomp, whom he met in the hall, as he entered the house.

Pomp carried it to Mrs. St. John's room, his eyes shining, round and white.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Look a-here!" said he, with a most significant expression. "Massa Cavello's '*foun*' de Colonel's op'ra cloak! I fought he'd fin' dat ar cloak, when he heerd me a talkin' so pinted 'bout it, roun' his do', and ev'ry time I see him in de house. I'se jes' cotched him wid it in de hall."

Pomp carried the cloak to the kitchen, and looked it over by the light. The bush of which the old man had boasted, had hardly done its duty. There were sad streaks of mud on the outside, as well as upon the scarlet lining.

"I reckon I'd better see 'bout dat," said Pomp. "Miss Marie'll done ax whar dat's ben, — looks like 't had ben on a spree, I do declar'. I mus' fotch it down to dat ar Chiny nigger what swashes de Colonel's shirts, an' irons 'em, when he's to home." And he carried it at once to Ah Chin's laundry, to be cleaned.

Bessie could n't let the story rest. As if the Colonel's opera cloak did n't belong already to people enough, without Tom's borrowing it! She ignored Leslie in the matter, and asked Tom to take her sack out to drive, some fine day. She said that nothing that opera cloak

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

might do could surprise her; she expected to see it riding on horseback, humming an air from "Robert le Diable," or walking up the church aisle.

She said it was a sort of goblin, a new form in which some spirit was making its appearance; for her part, she was afraid of it, and neither for love nor for money would she stay in the dark with it.

"Come, Bessie," said Tom, getting a little vexed. "If that joke can't die a natural death, let it die an unnatural one! Let this be the end of the opera cloak!"

"Death!" Bessie shivered. "If the opera cloak died, that would n't be the end of it; though it might be the end of me. It would come back to haunt us, — I know it would. Just as the clock struck one, I should see it stand by my bedside, up in the air, on its invisible legs, the gilt clasps gleaming like eyes. 'Come!' it would whisper, opening its flapping sides, 'I seek' " —

Bessie shut the door just in time to escape the sofa pillow which Tom aimed at her head.

Tom went out of town for a few days on

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

business. When he returned, the lawyer in the next office told him that a colored man had been knocking at his door every few minutes since he left. Tom wondered what was to pay at the St. Johns' now; he was obliged to go to court to wait for a case of his to be called up, but meant to see Leslie on his way home.

As he entered the court-room, the clerk, in a brown wig, black beard, and thick spectacles, was reading from a large blue paper, in a loud voice, that —

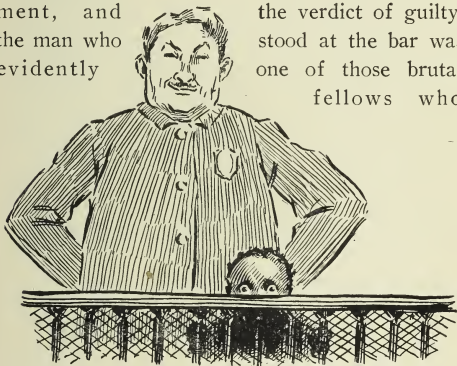
“John J. Jackson, of — aforesaid, laborer, at — aforesaid, on the tenth day of April, in the year of our Lord 187-, with force and arms, in and upon one Ah Chin, then and there in the peace of said State being, an assault did make, and him the said Ah Chin, with certain gravel and mire then and there in the hands of him the said Jackson held, did beat, bruise, wound, and evil treat: against the statute in such case provided, and the peace and dignity of the State aforesaid.”

The prosecuting attorney then arose and addressed the court, standing with his back to the culprit, saying that the prisoner had been here-

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

tofore convicted upon this indictment: it was his duty now to move for sentence.

He said he knew nothing of the details of this particular case, having been out of town when it was tried by his assistant; but that, from the facts set forth in the indictment, and the verdict of guilty, the man who stood at the bar was evidently one of those brutal fellows who



had been making attacks of late upon the unoffending Chinese residents of the city. Such men as he should learn by a bitter lesson that they are not the lords of this community.

He said he would present to the court, in order that the particulars of the offence might

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

be fully understood, the evidence of the Chinaman, and of the policeman who had made the arrest.

At this point, an irrepressible smile began to break over the face of the judge, and half-smothered but increasing laughter was heard in the court-room, above the thumping of the sheriff's stick.

Whereupon the prosecuting attorney, turning round to see what was the matter, caught sight, for the first time, of "the prisoner," — a thin, small black boy, his face ashy with terror, his wool sticking out in little tails all over his head, vainly endeavoring to raise his glaring white eyes over the rails of the small iron fence within which he was impounded.

It was John Jasper Jackson. The prosecuting attorney sat down, and joined in the laughter, which now became general.

At this point, a high, wide policeman, in blue and gold, with a fiery beard, and a mahogany club in his belt, advanced, pushing a small yellow Chinaman before him, with a black embroidered gown, pointed shoes, and a pigtail.

The Chinaman was duly sworn, in sonorous phrases, which he did not understand, "to tes-

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

tify the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, concerning the matter now in hearing," wondering meanwhile why the policeman wanted to make him hold his right arm up in the air.

Ah Chin, in response to many subtly worded inquiries, spoken in a loud, distinct tone, was finally brought to say that the "miggee boy" threw mud at his clean shirts, and tried to rob him of "big miggee's" red gown.

Here the officious policeman, to clinch the story, with much crackling of brown paper, unfolded, and held up at arm's length, red side out, the Colonel's opera cloak.

Pomp, who had been vainly seeking Tom, arrived at this moment, and was much struck by the pageant.

"Massy gracious!" he cried to the policeman. "Ain't yer done enuf, to ketch one pore lettle nigger boy, 'thout hookin' de Colonel's op'ra cloak?"

The policeman was then called to the witness-stand, and, folding the cloak, — quite as if he was the Colonel, — proceeded to tell what he knew of the affair: how he had seen this black boy before the Chinaman's door, where mud had evidently been thrown into the shop,

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and had caught him with his fist full of wet sand.

At this point, the prosecuting attorney rose, and said that in the hurry of business he had evidently been mistaken as to the age and size of the offender, but that, nevertheless, he merited a sharp punishment.

The clerk demanded of the prisoner if he had yet found his "counsel."

John Jasper, who had caught sight of Tom conferring with Pomp, encouraged by a wink from the young man, called out in his high, thin voice, —

"Dar's Massa Tom, — he knows me, don't yer, Massa Tom? An' yer knows de Colonel's op'ra cloak yer had de day yer took Miss Leslie out to ride; an' yer knows dat's our cloak, an' dat yeller man he hooked it, an' I seed it hangin' in his ketchen door, an' he would n't let me hev it, an' I frowed mud at him, an' " —

Tom was just rising, when the judge said, —

"Mr. Douglas, this young desperado seems to be a friend of yours: what can you tell us about him?"

Tom, who had been talking with Pomp, and saw how matters stood, briefly explained to the

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

judge the mistake into which the boy had fallen. He knew him to be a good boy, and, if the judge would release him, he would be surety for his good behavior: the trouble was simply that the boy loved this opera cloak, "not wisely, but too well."

His suggestion was at once carried out; and Tom then and there entered into a solemn covenant with the State. He acknowledged himself bound, together with his heirs, that the aforesaid John J. Jackson, laborer, should keep the peace and be of good behavior for the term of twelve calendar months: in default of which, he, the said Thomas Douglas, attorney at law, would forfeit the sum of one hundred dollars unto the aforesaid State, out of his goods and estate, and, in default thereof, his body; and thereupon he became the legal custodian of John Jasper Jackson.

Tom meant to guard this fine story from Bessie; but at the tea-table the thought of Jasper's white eyes gleaming over the railing came across him, and he burst into such a fit of laughter that the family all jumped: and then they insisted on sharing the joke.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Bessie woke up in the middle of the night, and laughed. She hoped these delightful St. Johns would never go away. To have them at hand was like having a season ticket to a circus.



VI

WHEN Mrs. Douglas was refurnishing her back parlor, she had asked the Doctor, as a sort of compliment, what color in a carpet would please him best. The Doctor, gratified at being consulted, replied, "Let the carpet be red, and let the paper have gold buttons on it;" — she had already bought a Morris paper, with dado and tiles, — "and let the furniture be red, too, — it looks so cheerful."

Mrs. Douglas, like the wise woman that she was, smiled on the Doctor, and forthwith went her own way.

The Doctor was the man who had always called "gimp" "jimp," till he had felt the ennobling influence of woman's love; and who still spoke of "shams" as "mock pillows." He knew not a polonaise from an arab, strange to

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

say, after years of married life; and, when his wife's suit of Russian gray came home, he asked in a grieved tone why she and Bessie never wore "red spencers."

Well, the room was refurnished: a few red chairs relieved its fashionable gloom, and the open fire put a soul into it. A room, be it ever so rich, is a tomb without an open fire and sunshine.

The Doctor looked about him with pride, when it was furnished. It was *his* taste, you know! He did not miss the red carpet nor the gold spots on the paper, which Mrs. Douglas had interpreted as being the "gold buttons" designated.

"This is a room to live in," he said; and he slipped into his easy-chair by the fire, and put his feet on the fender.

The rain was beating furiously on the panes, and the wind was lashing the vines against the windows.

The poor Doctor had been out the night before and all day long in the rain, and he prayed earnestly that pain might cease, or that, if it should not, its victims might send for the doctor around the corner.

"This is the night of nights for Mrs. St.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

John to have the neuralgia," said Bessie, in an encouraging tone, as she peeped out of the window. "Her unselfish soul would revel in sending poor Pomp out in this furious storm. I seem to hear the night-bell, and Pomp's 'Massa Doctor, Miss Marie, she's 'most done dead wid sort o' fits in her mouf, — 'pears like to be de toofache, ef anybody else had done got it. She's been 'mos' dyin' all day, but she would n't boder nobody to git de doctor, tell in de middle ob de night, 'cause she hates to boder folks in de daytime.' "

"Stop, Bess," said the Doctor, wearily. "You make me tired. Heaven rest the sufferers to-night, and delay Mrs. St. John's neuralgia until morning."

About one o'clock, the Doctor's night-bell was pulled furiously; but he, poor man, was so overcome with sleep, that he only dreamed that he was late for the cars, and was making frantic but ineffectual efforts to jump on to a morning train.

A second ring awakened Tom, who put his head out of the window. "Halloo!" said he. "Want the Doctor?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, massy gracious, Massa Tom!" Pomp's voice called from the darkness. "Call de Doctor, for massy's sake: my little Jasper's dyin', I'se sure. Don't wait for nuffin' but de physic-jugs, an' come 'long, for he's got de croup or de colic or de consum'tion, or suthin'. Miss Leslie, she's a-holdin' of him and nussin' of him whiles I runs here."

Tom roused his father, who, with his eyes half-shut, gathered up his medicines; and the two set out together. Pomp had vanished in the darkness. •

When they reached the house, Clarence, in his night-gown, opened the door, crying with all his might, —

"O Doctor, do hurry and give Jasper some stuff, for he's 'most dying!" And the poor little fellow burst into a howl of woe, and then threw himself down on the stairs.

In the parlor, Leslie sat upon the broad, low satin sofa, half-holding the sick child, who, pale and weak, breathed only in faint groans.

She did not speak when they entered, and hardly noticed Tom, — he seemed far away, with the sunshine and the daylight. Tears were slowly rolling down her pale cheeks. Tom

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

wished he could kiss them away, and then was ashamed of the thought, where one thought only seemed in place; and he humbly and quietly seated himself in the shadow.

The Doctor examined the boy, and asked questions of the others. His throat had been sore for several days, and he had "felt sick, — but not so sick that he could n't tussle and wrastle," Clarence explained, as he stood shivering in his scanty raiment.

"Doctor," said Pomp, drawing him into a corner near Tom, "I mus' tell yer de symp-tims. John Jasper ain't never dreffle strong, — his const'tution ain't good. He's had de consum'tion twice, an' times an' times he'd a perished, ef I had n't ben a-lookin' after him. Yes'-day aft'noon he fell down on to his side, — de side what's had de fits into it before; an' wid his sore froat, an' all, I know he's gwine fur to die.

"When de death-cravin' come on, says I to me, 'He's a-gwine to die.' Fust, he axed fur some tripe, an' I cooked it fur him, an' he eat it all up. Den he axed fur some watermillion, — pore boy, — but I could n't git him none, 'cause 't ain't de time fur watermillions. Den he axed

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

fur some pie, an' I giv him dat, an' he eat it all up; an' den he axed fur some fish, an' I got dat, an' cook it an' giv it to him, an' he eat it all up. I could n't git no pigs' feet fur him, so he axed fur liver, an' I got it an' cook it, an', don't yer b'lieve, he never eat one mou'ful of it! Den I fought, he's gwine to die right away, dis aft'noon.

"After dat, he got better, an' spoke up smart an' peart, an' I fought p'r'aps we could bring him round; but now, Massa, he's gwine, — I've seen heaps of 'em gwine, an' I knows de looks."

"I am afraid he is, my poor fellow," said the Doctor.

"Don't tell Miss Leslie," said Pomp, eager to spare his darling one pain. "Don't tell her, not tell it comes."

"See, Jasper," said Wilfrid, his trousers hanging by one suspender, "you may have my football."

The poor little eyes unclosed, and the boy opened his arms to receive it.

"That ain't nothing, Jasper," added Wilfrid. "I'll give you my new six-bladed knife with a file and a tooth-pick and a glove-buttoner."

A faint smile touched the poor little face.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom never thought of laughing at the inappropriate gift.

"O Jasper," cried Clarence, bursting into a torrent of tears, and throwing himself on the floor, "you may have every thing I've got, all my marbles, and my new alleys, and the kite and the gun, and every thing, if you'll only get well! And I'll let you slide on the banisters every day, if you won't die."

The crying aroused the sick child, and at the last words he opened his eyes and looked about.

"Massa Doctor," said he, in a faint, choked little voice, "is I gwine to die sure? Is I gwine to glory 'lone, 'thout nobody?"

"Oh, I hope not, my little fellow. Swallow this, and try to get well," said the Doctor, in a cheerful tone.

"I has n't never seen de Lord Jesus," said the child. "But I done reckon I knows him. Ole Sally, she loves to die, and she said he was allus hangin' 'bout de gate to fotch in de folks dat wants to git in, an' int'duce 'em to his frien's. I ain't got nobody dar, 'cept Joseph an' Moses an' dat crowd, an' I wants to wait, Massa Doctor, tell my gran'fa' goes fust, to be lookin' out

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

fur me; fur it's dreffle dark an' rainy to-night, Massa Doctor, and I'se afeerd dat de Lord Jesus can't see a lettle nigger boy when de night's so black. I s'pect I'd better holler my name all de time, so he'll know I'se a-comin'."

After a few minutes, he broke the silence again: —

"I done wish I could wait, Massa Doctor, tell my gran'fa' an' Miss Leslie's done gone; fur my gran'fa', he'd know, de fust time I called out, an' I'd see Miss Leslie a-comin' to fotch me, in a white dress, an' tell me de supper was waitin' hot, like de day she did when I got los'."

Mrs. St. John, whose faint sobs had been heard in the next room, appeared at the door in her wrapper, with a severe look upon her face.

"Doctor," said she, "don't you know of some stuff to cure that child? I don't see, for my part, what's the good of having a doctor, if he can't cure a poor little darkey. We were often ill South, but we always got well; and here we are alive. I don't know what the Colonel will do to you, if you let that boy die."

The Doctor took no notice of her, and she

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

went back to bed, convinced that she had stirred him up to his duty.

Jasper opened his languid eyes.

"I wants to see de Colonel," he piped, in a high, thin voice, "ef I'se a-gwine to die. Massa Doctor, can't I live tell de Colonel gits home? He said he'd fotch me suthin', an' I wants to see what it's gwine to be. I loves de Colonel, an' de Colonel loves me. He said I might black his boots all de time, when he come agin."

Pomp quietly followed the Doctor's orders, and Leslie bathed the cold forehead and the passive hands. She bent over the child, and kissed him. It seemed to Tom, sitting in the shadow, that an angel had appeared to do a humble service.

Outside, the watchman paced the sidewalk, and the rain drove against the windows. The bells clanged four o'clock.

The little French clock ticked on: it was the only bit of furniture that did its duty in that "rack-and-manger" house.

In the dim parlor, love, the best of all things, was surrounding and comforting the little black boy, as his life was slowly wearing away. He

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

held the ball in his arms. The boys had poured out their playthings around him, and he appeared to be enjoying them.

Once in a while he was seized with a terrible pain, and then it seemed as if the boys would die with agony. Jasper was of the same age as Clarence. I do not believe the boys knew any difference in their affection for him and for each other. Jasper and Clarence had often slept together on the parlor sofa or on the stairs, when sleep overtook them there.

The terrible spasm over, Jasper opened his eyes, which looked large and white.

"Ef I 'se gwine to die, Massa Doctor, an' de Colonel ain't come home, I wants de Colonel's op'ra cloak frowed over me. Ef I ken smell de Colonel's cigar in it, an' ef I shets my eyes, 'pears like de Colonel's here. I 'mos' hear him say, 'Jasper, I 'se — fotched — you — somethin'."

Leslie looked at the Doctor with questioning eyes, but found no encouragement in his look. The little head grew heavy on her lap, the breathing grew fainter and slower. Leslie drew the opera cloak closer about the boy, as she felt him shiver.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

For a moment the room was silent.

"My dear," said the Doctor, "it is over. Little Jasper has gone." Then Leslie bent over him and cried. She had tried so hard to keep back the tears before. Pomp came to comfort her, as if Jasper's death had been a greater grief to her than to him.

The boys, in utter misery, were sobbing loudly. Mrs. St. John was endeavoring to faint, and Pomp was needed to take care of her. Tom took Leslie's burning hands in his, hardly knowing what he did.

"Come home with us," said he. "You have done all you can: let the others do the rest." Although she shook her head, there was comfort for her in his voice.

The gray light struggled in through the shades with a dismal loneliness that the night had failed to bring.

The boys, worn out with crying, crept away, awed into stillness by the quiet of death. Their little playfellow now seemed old and wise to them, holding a secret they could not know; and they turned from him in fear.

"Nobody shall touch him but Pomp and

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

me," said Leslie, all at once a thoughtful woman.

She brought a night-gown for the little fellow, and made a bed on the sofa to lay him on.

Pomp, to whom she had always turned for comfort, was lost in admiration.

"O Miss Leslie, honey," said he, in a trembling voice, "don't yer do any more: yer acts, chile, 's ef yer was de gran'fa' of dis pore lettle boy. Yer go to yer bed, an' git a lettle sleep."

"O Pomp," said the girl, "don't send me to bed! You've sat up for me many a night when I was sick or sorry; and I sha'n't desert you now in your trouble. Let the others go. I will stay with you."

The Doctor and Tom went away, and left the tried friends together in the dreary house.

In the morning Mrs. Douglas went to see Leslie. She knew that Mrs. St. John would only appear as chief mourner, — not a helpful character to assume.

The unruly door between the parlors had been closed. Mrs. St. John had exchanged rooms with Leslie: it made her nervous to be so near a dead person.

Leslie was laying flowers about the parlor.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I shall never forget your sending me these," said she, going to Mrs. Douglas, with a tearful smile. But Mrs. Douglas had not sent them.

"Nobody can do any thing for me," she added. "The boys have been so good, poor fellows! They are almost sick with crying. I am going with Pomp this afternoon, to buy a place in the cemetery for poor little Jasper. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to die — or to live!" cried the girl, breaking down, and throwing her arms about Mrs. Douglas, who took her to her heart in real motherly fashion, smoothing her hair and kissing her.

"You must come to stay with us for a few days, my dear, when this is over, and get rested," she said.

The next day Tom and Bessie went to the house. The minister was there. He read a few lines of comfort, and spoke words of kindness; and then Pomp and the others took little Jasper to his last resting-place.

They stood by the grave for a moment, while Pomp muttered a short prayer, and reverently raised his hat, — it was Mr. Cavello's hat, — and then, drawing the Colonel's opera cloak about him, he put Leslie and the rest of the company

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

into the carriages, and turned his face toward home.

"Dis yere death's a mighty myste'ous thing, Miss Leslie," said Pomp, as the two sat, a



short time after this, on the kitchen stairs, waiting for the kettle to boil. Stairs were much approved of as seats by the St. Johns: they were always safe; and chairs were treacherous, and never could be depended on.

"Yes, Pomp," said Leslie: "a few days ago,

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and we could ask Jasper what he knew or felt or thought; and now, if we asked him, he could n't tell us so that we could understand."

"Why, Miss Leslie," asked Pomp, in sudden alarm, "why could n't we un'stan' him? Yer don't 'spect he'll talk de wrong way, like de Jew in de pawn-shop, or de Chinyman, does yer, — so 't I can't un'stan' him when I gits dar? I hope he ain't gwine to git so larned dat I shall hev to be int'duced to him! Does yer tink, Miss Leslie, dey grows up, or stays de way dey was when dey goes in?"

"I don't know," said Leslie, who tried in her simple way to be good, and in so trying wrought out a sweet and Christlike religion. "I don't know: only the hymn says, —

'We shall know each other there.'

I reckon, Pomp, it will be just as if we had been away from our friends for a good while, and when we saw them again, they were changed, and were gentler and kinder and more beautiful; and we should see that they were different, and yet they 'd be the same. We 'd know them as soon as they spoke, even though it was in a dark room, and we did n't know they were there."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Pomp's tearful eyes glistened with pride.

"Dar's good comfort in dat, Miss Leslie," he said. "'Pears like de Lord's speakin' froo yer. 'Pears like I sees John Jasper now, all dressed up an' lookin' as good as Massa Tom; yit he'll be my boy an' yer boy; an' I done reckon dat chile won't leave his eyes off dat gate a-watchin' fur yer an' fur me.

"De way to Prov'dence is pas' findin' out, Miss Leslie," added he, piously rolling his eyes. "Somehow, I don't look wid no respec', no more, on de Colonel's op'ra cloak. I feels, somehow or nudder, dat ef dat cloak had done his duty, dat chile would be tumblin' downstairs or suthin', dis minute here. I tole Jasper, on Monday, not to go out widout puttin' on de op'ra cloak, fear he'd cotch cole in his chist; an' nowhar could he fin' it. 'Pears sometimes 's ef dat cloak had got legs on to it dat we can't see, an' jes' walked itself off an' hid under tings an' behin' tings. I should n't never hev foun' whar it was a-hidin', ef I hed n't los' my shoe, an' I was scoochin' down, lookin' under ev'ry ting, an' dar was dat op'ra cloak a-squeezin' in 'tween de wall an' de sofy, whar nobody would n't never hev looked fur it.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Why, we might hev gone away from dis house, an' never hev foun' it, Miss Leslie, an' what would de Colonel hev said? I reckon I knows!"

"O Pomp," said Leslie, the tears filling her beautiful eyes, "don't wish Jasper back! He's better off than we are."

"Yes," said Pomp: "I reckon he's better off; an' yit he was putty good off, when he was here. Ef yer count up what folks calls massies, he hed mos' on 'em. He hed n't no gran'ma', but there's a good many folks hain't. I hain't got no gran'ma', — no, nor no gran'fa', nuther; but I don' tink much 'bout it, 'cept when I hears folks speakin' on 'em. But how'll dis be: — John Jasper's mo'er died when he was a little baby. She won't know him: he won't know her, 'less his gran'ma' tells him who she is. But, den," said Pomp, falling into confusion in his genealogies, as many others have done, "his gran'ma' she never seen Jasper! It's me dat hed ought to passed away fust, to hev hed tings all straighted up. 'Pears like nothin' don't go straight, ef I is n't dar to 'tend to it."

"I reckon things will go right in heaven with-

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

out you, Pomp," said Leslie, with a faint smile, "but I am sure they would n't here in this family. I wish we were like the Douglasses. Every thing goes so smoothly there, and they are so good! They help poor people, and they go to mission-schools."

Pomp looked very solemn.

"I used to be awful 'ligious," he said. "I used to go to heaps o' woods-meetin's, an' I hol-lered louder 'n any one on 'em. Why, Miss Leslie, I was baptized in de Rappahannick, in jes' de spot, in de very water, dat Gen'l Washin'ton was baptized in, — no, 't was n't Gen'l Washin'ton, nuther: 't was Joyce Heth. I done 'member she was Gen'l Washin'ton's nuss! So I was baptized on hysteric groun', yer see!

"Oh, I got 'ligion, in dem days, so dere wa'n't no doin' nothin' wid me; but," Pomp sighed, "I ain't hed no time dese las' years fur 'ligion. I 'se had to see to all o' yer."

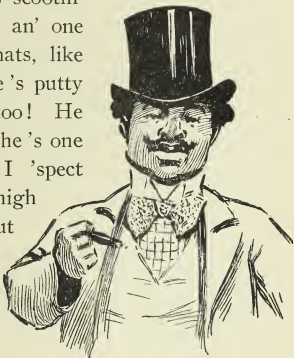
"They all ran away but you," said Leslie: "that was when I was very little."

"Yes, dey got free, an' so dey run off. Dey said I was a fool to stay here; but I 'membered what I done promise to ole Missus when she was a-dyin'. Says she, 'Don't yer never leave

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Miss Marie, 'cause she's hard to git 'long wid, an' nobody can't git 'long wid her 'cept jes' yer.' An' den de Colonel he got pore, an' I wa'n't goin' to clar out when my frien's gits pore. Dat's de time when yer wants yer frien's.

"My brudder he's in Phil'delphy. He's got a barber's shop, an' he goes out ha'r-dressin', — he can't do it no better nor I kin, — an' he makes heaps o' money. He dresses up mighty fine, dey says, an' goes scootin' round wid a cane, an' one o' dem high-top hats, like Massa Tom's. He's putty high in meetin's, too! He passes de box, an' he's one ob de deacons. I 'spect he'll be powerful high in de kingdom. But de good Lord he'll 'cuse me, I 'spect; fur I can't git no time to be 'ligious,—dar's suthin' to do allers. I don't seem to git froo.



"When we gits settled agin, I must look up my 'ligion. I ain't kep' but a little on 't, — jes'

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

to say my pra'ers, an' do my duty, an' love de Lord an' ev'rybody, — dat is, ev'rybody 'cept — 'cept Massa Cavello; but, den, he don't 'mount to much."

"I think that is pretty much the whole of religion," said Leslie. "It always comforts me to know that you pray for us, Pomp; and I'm sure nobody in the world is so unselfish as you."

"Oh, I ain't onselfish," said Pomp. "I has n't never done tings fur folks. I has n't visited 'em in prison, an' I has n't gin clo'es to nobody, an' I hain't fed nobody what was hungry, — 'cept de boys, of course: dey's ben hungry times 'nuf, an' I 'se put dere clo'es on times 'nuf, too."

"Now jes' look at dat kittle!" cried Pomp. "I can't talk to nobody, but dat kittle gits so res'less an' biles over, pokin' up de kiver like he could n't wait tell I gits dar!"

"Pomp!" cried Clarence, coming to the stairs. "Hurry up there! I'm 'most starved to death. Is n't supper 'most ready?"

"Well," said Leslie, rising, "I almost wish I was where Jasper is. What's the use of being raised, to wish, half the time, you had n't been born?"

Pomp wiped his tears away.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Nobody has n't ben sayin' any ting to yer, has he?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of Mr. Cavello's room. "I hes set Massa Tom off for you! I wishes de Colonel would come back an' see to dat nigger, — for I 'spect he ain't nothin' else, — a-passin' hisself off for a gent'man."

Mr. Cavello had been missing, while little Jasper lay dead in the house; and he now crossed himself as he passed the parlor door.

Leslie despised him. What a mean, contemptible little soul he had! How noble Tom's was! But, then, of course there was no one so kind, so good, so handsome, so generous, so learned as Tom! She could only gaze upon him from afar: he could never care any thing for a girl like her.

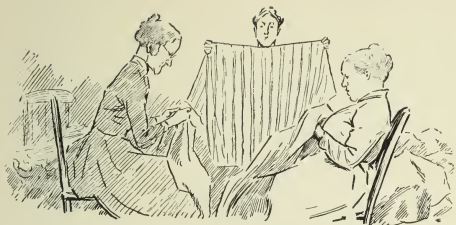
She thrilled with pain, as she compared herself with Miss Henderson, about whom she had heard Bessie tease him, and who made her feel so stupid. Every thing about Miss Henderson spoke out: the very ruffles plumed themselves, and hinted at the shabby frills on Leslie's dress. Her eyes said, "See how bright we are!" and her smile, "How gracious I am!" When she played, her white hands cried, "Listen! did you ever hear

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

such music?" and, when she ceased playing, she slipped so gracefully into her place, sometimes saying, "I'm glad you enjoy it: it is one of my favorite sonatas. How it recalls those heavenly evenings in Heidelberg!"

Poor Leslie! she did n't know where Heidelberg was. When she finished her simple songs, her cheeks got red, and she wanted to put her face in her hands. She wished she was a fine young lady, like Miss Henderson.

Pomp had said he had set Tom off for her; and, although she smiled when she thought of it, it comforted her.



VII

THE warm weather came that year all at once. Mrs. St. John bloomed into life with the flowers, and left her bed when they arose from theirs.

She sent Leslie for patterns of muslins and tissues; and dress-makers and seamstresses thronged the house. Her listless manner passed away, and she fell enthusiastically into the discussion of flounces, frills, side-plaiting, and box-plaiting.

The Colonel had sent home more money lately, and they had been able to have new clothes and a better table, and had paid fewer bills. Mrs. St. John sent the Doctor an elegant dressing-gown, — he had two already, — and to Mrs. Douglas fresh flowers every day, but took no more notice of the Doctor's bill than if it had

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

never been sent. One May morning the sun poured down as hot as in July; and, cheerful and amiable and handsome, Mrs. St. John announced that she was going out of town with Pomp, to engage summer board. She had heard of a place in the country which was just the thing.

The proprietor of the hotel was quite struck by the appearance of this elegant Southern lady, attended by a colored servant; and he exerted himself to please her.

She must have all large rooms, and they must all be on the front, and they must open into each other. Two large rooms on the front were already engaged; but she said the people must take some other rooms; they could n't expect, if they only took two, to have a choice situation; she wanted five large rooms. The polite landlord said he would see the "other party," and try to arrange the matter. Mrs. St. John inquired particularly about the table, and looked critically over the bill of fare.

She did not demur at the high price, but left her decision hanging on the withdrawal of the "other persons."

After three days, during which time the landlord had interviewed the "party," he wrote to

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

her that he had lost the people who had the front rooms, but considered it best to let them go, as her family was so large, and wanted so many apartments.

Mrs. St. John dropped the letter behind her bed, after reading it. "That horrid Yankee!" she said. "As if I did n't know where I wanted to go!" And she decided now to go to the sea-shore.

After a few days, the man wrote again, and then again; and, receiving no answer, he went humbly to the "other party," and coaxed him back at a reduced price.

Mrs. St. John and Pomp took a trip to the sea-shore. The hotel was a very fine one, built on rocks directly overlooking the sea.

The rooms were nearly all engaged; but she made the landlord turn people in and out, and finally arranged to go on the first of July, with all her family, for the summer.

She wrote to the Colonel that she was going there to get Leslie off; that his horrid friend was making love to *her* all the time, and would n't look at Leslie; and that the Doctor's son did not commit himself, although she had given him chances every day in the week and Sundays

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

beside; for she made Leslie go to church, and had taken a seat for her right in front of the Douglasses; and she had tried to induce her to take a class in the mission-school where Tom taught; but Leslie was so stubborn, and said she did n't know enough to teach, — as if that made any difference! Now she should give her a last chance.

The amiable Colonel, who was sojourning in St. Louis, talking of claims and institutions, and the poor, homeless, wandering, unhappy millions of the colored race, and of the blue blood and untrammelled spirits of the chivalry, — but who had smiles for Northern land-purchasers, and good-humoredly ate their dinners, — replied that her idea was a good one, but not to let the little girl marry any fellow who would be unkind to her.

The first of July came, and the family set off for the Elden House, in high spirits. Mr. Cavello had gone to a neighboring city to dine with a friend; and Mrs. St. John had neglected to tell him what day she was going; or, rather, she decided to go while he was away.

The boys were all in new suits; Leslie wore a dark blue flannel dress and a sailor hat; and

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Pomp was arrayed in some "clo'es he foun' roun' de house." And the carriage came, the mansion was closed, and away they went.

Mr. Cavello, returning at dusk, was dismayed at the deserted air of the house, where the windows had always blazed with light. He rang the bell: the handle came off,—it came off so easily!—and then he pounded, and then he kicked. He went to the basement door; but for once the curtains were down and silence reigned. A servant near by, seeing his despair, told him that the family all went off at noon, and that the black man said they would n't be back for a good many weeks.

Mr. Cavello was in a rage. He struck his thin wisp of a cane on the sidewalk, until it broke. He raved in his native tongue, and, judging from his manner, his language was strong and pointed.

But he had to go away unsatisfied. He could find no "open sesame."

The first week of the St. Johns' stay at the Elden House had passed, when Mrs. St. John wrote to Bessie and Tom, inviting them to visit her.

Bessie did not care to go: she said that she

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

was afraid of the opera cloak. Mrs. Douglas remarked that she thought Tom would be a brave young man to visit the St. Johns, and make himself responsible, as it were, for them. Tom declared that he was brave, and that life had been dull since the opera cloak left town; and he thought he would run down Thursday night, and see how it was getting on.

When the coach drove up to the hotel piazza that Thursday, it was about six o'clock. Ladies who had gentlemen were promenading the piazza, and ladies who expected them were standing about the door waiting.

When Tom jumped out, he noticed at once a pretty girl. It was Leslie, but so changed! She had been driving, and wore her blue flannel dress and sailor hat. The hat was pushed back, sailor-fashion, on her head, and her hair was ruffled by the wind. She had wild flowers in her hand. She came up, smiling and blushing.

"I am so sorry I was late! I went to drive with Mr. Merrill, and have only just returned. I wanted to dress before you came."

Tom took one instant to hate Mr. Merrill, and then he wondered what celestial raiment, what purple and fine linen, could be found to make

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

this beautiful being more beautiful. He could not believe that this was the Leslie who had worn her aunt's clothes and Clarence's boots, — she was so charming, so stylish! Well, if Tom had come down with even the little pointed end of his heart untouched, or one of the scallops at the top, it must have given way now!

Mrs. St. John came to meet him with great cordiality; and Arthur and Wilfrid and Clarence said it was "high old jolly" to see him again, and, when they heard of Mr. Cavello's attempt to get into the house, they fairly jumped up and down in delight.

Mrs. St. John was so handsome, and her clothes were so elegant, and her niece was so lovely, that the family were very popular at the hotel; and Tom saw, with pride and fear, that Leslie was the most attractive girl in the house.

There was to be a hop that evening, and Tom was to come to Mrs. St. John's door at eight o'clock, to take her and Leslie downstairs. But an old beau, of the kind which belongs to every summer hotel, with gray hair and pink cheeks, MacVickar by name, came, with all his soul in his eyes, — his eyes were small, but he put all his soul into them, — to beg the honor of

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

taking Mrs. St. John down; and so Leslie was left for Tom.

Leslie had never seen any thing, and had never been anywhere, except for a short time to a third-rate boarding-school; and she thought that now she was in Paradise. She did not have to pin her dress-waists over; her boots fitted her; and everybody was so lovely and kind and beautiful!

Mrs. St. John had let slip a word about the great responsibility of having a young heiress and a beauty on her hands: fortune-hunters were so plenty, and artists and other fellows without money took so kindly to a rich and handsome girl, that her aunt must of necessity lead a life of watchfulness, and sleep with one eye open.

All this summer, life was of rose-color for Leslie. She walked, she drove, she kissed all the babies, she told stories to the children, who pursued her all over the house. She was engaged days in advance for croquet; and the light-haired, weak little son of the rich Mr. Tileson begged for a game a week ahead, and asked her, from the top of the stage, to wear his colors — a magenta ribbon — in her button-hole until he returned. The handsome cadet from West Point wrecked his best suit by cutting gilt buttons from

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

it to string upon little Tleson's red ribbon; and Mr. Bennett, who had been crossed in love by the young lady who sat on the rocks all day and sketched "the sea, the lone, dark sea," asked Leslie to let him carry her fan, to make the mermaid jealous; and Leslie was sorry for him, and made the young lady very jealous. The old gentlemen admired Leslie: she opened their papers for them; and for the gouty old fellow who sat next her at the table she saved the choice bits of lobster, and made believe she liked legs best. When Mrs. Morris begged the little Stevenses not to drag their tin carts up and down the piazza under her windows, Leslie promised them a splendid story "that long," if they'd stay on the lawn. She seemed instinctively to know how to get into people's hearts.

Old Mr. Morris used to laugh at the shells and buttons she wore on her ribbon, and called it her scalp-string.

Would eight o'clock never come? Some people think hours measure alike. It is not so: happy hours are cut short, that weary ones may be lengthened.

Leslie had been ready for an hour. Pomp was on his knees before Mrs. St. John, lacing

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

her boots. She asked Leslie to peep out, and see if Mr. MacVickar was waiting, and to go out if he was. Leslie said no, but that Mr. Tom was there. "Then go and walk with him," said Mrs. St. John.

Leslie wore a white dotted muslin, made in the simplest way. It was high in the neck, with a little ruche, and had elbow-sleeves with ruffles, and a long, plain skirt, ruffled around the bottom. Mrs. St. John had put on the finishing touch by adding a scarlet crape sash, and putting a bit of geranium in her hair. She wore white slippers and long gloves; and a fan of white feathers was tied to her waist by a scarlet ribbon.

Tom caught his breath, when this vision of loveliness appeared before him.

"Don't I look right smart?" said Leslie. "Is n't this dress pretty?"

"Why, I never saw any thing like it in my life!" said the young fellow, forgetting Gertrude Henderson's French dresses, which he had once admired so much.

"I don't know as you'll go down with me, Miss Leslie. I have n't a dress suit here. You didn't tell me there was to be a hop;

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and I'm no dancing man, any way," added Tom.

"I don't know how to dance, either," said Leslie, taking his offered arm, while they slowly promenaded through the long hall. "I know the 'Lancers,' and pieces of other dances; but I reckon I can get through. Can't you dance at all?"

"I can dance the 'Lancers' or a cotillion," said Tom, "if I am with somebody who is good to me, and tells me in time when I am to make a courtesy, and the dame to make a bow."

"Oh, I know enough to tell that," said Leslie, "so you'd better dance with me. Hark! they are tuning their music. Let's walk on the piazza."

The night was soft and clear; all the little stars had come out; the great, dark sea stretched far away; and the light-house lantern flashed and disappeared, as Leslie and Tom, arm-in-arm, watched it from the piazza, where they stood alone.

Old Cannon Rock was booming, as the incoming tide rushed into its sounding caverns. A row-boat was moving through the water: they

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

could hear soft voices, and see the water fall in golden rain from the oars.

"I wonder," said Leslie, leaning her head against a pillar, "if everybody is not perfectly, perfectly happy, sometimes."

"I hope so, with all my heart," said Tom, wondering whether his day was coming.

"Because," continued Leslie, "I think people could bear to be hungry, and cold, and not have people care any thing for them, and have things go wrong all the time, — if they were only perfectly happy once. If it was when they were young, they could say in the horrid days, 'I've been happy once, and it was good enough to pay for these times;' or, if all their lives had been very hard and uncomfortable, they could say, when the perfectly happy days came, 'This pays for it all.' Do you believe it is so?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "It seems as if some people never had their day. Have you ever been perfectly happy?"

"Yes," said Leslie, hesitatingly: "I am *almost* perfectly happy to-night."

"What makes you happy? Because you are going to a dance, and there's to be some fellow there that you want to see?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I'd like to murder him!" added Tom, to himself.

Leslie did n't say a word: she only looked out to sea.

"I beg your pardon," said Tom, coldly. "I had no business to ask that."

"Oh, yes, you had," said Leslie's soft voice; "and, if you had n't, no matter. I never mind, if people are only kind to me, what they say; and you have been kinder to me than almost anybody."

"What good fortune for me, that the Colonel's business detained him over to-night!" said Mr. MacVickar's thin voice to Mrs. St. John, as they came upon the two young people standing in the moonlight. "Old fool!" said Tom, in a low tone.

"Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed,"

Mr. MacVickar added, waving his hand gracefully. Ha! ha! Not exactly appropriate, but we hope it will be! And what will the other adorers say to this, Miss Leslie, — Mr. Merrill, and Mr. Tileson, and the host who bend the knee?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom could gladly have flung Mr. MacVickar into the sea. The two passed on.

"Well," said Tom, trying to re-establish the conversation, and wanting to hear Leslie repeat her words. "I was never kind to you. I only wish I could be. If there was any thing I could do to make you not almost, but perfectly" —

They both started. A man hung suspended in the air before them. Leslie caught Tom's hand in terror. He threw his arm about her; when a wicked giggle sounded from the piazza roof, and the man began to dance about, flapping his legs in the air.

"Say, Leslie, we've heard all you said, — te, he, he, he, he! and all your beau said!"

The man flopped about. He was a pair of pantaloons, a pillow, a hat, and the Colonel's opera cloak; and he was suspended by the neck by a cord, and jiggled according to the fancy of his creators.

Leslie was ready to cry. Tom caught the hanging man, and nearly jerked the young, untrammelled spirits of the chivalry into early graves! They held on to the little railing above, and howled.

"You shut up, there! You can't get Leslie!



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

She's going to marry Mr. Merrill, — so, there! Ain't you sweet on Leslie, — taking her to ride and dumping her in a mud-puddle? — te, he, te, he!"

The band struck up. The dancers took their places. Leslie beat time to the music with her foot.

"Let us go in and look on, it is so bright and merry," said she, ashamed and frightened. "You won't mind what the boys said, will you? I am so sorry! They say any thing when they are teasing me."

"I don't mind any thing they say: it's only what you say that I mind," replied Tom.

"Come," said the young girl, hurrying him on. "I do wish the boys would n't tease me so."

As they stepped into the light, Tom saw tears on her long lashes; and his manner softened.

"Never mind," said he: "we don't care what they say."

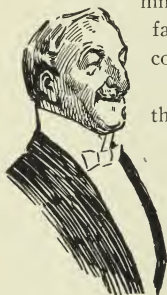
His tone comforted her, and she went happily into the hall on his arm.

Mrs. St. John was quite in her element. Mr. MacVickar leaned over her chair and fanned her. Mr. Norton, who had only arrived that night, had begged to be introduced; and he now had the honor of holding her bouquet. Mr.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Gray asked why she had been so selfish as to find occupation for only two admirers. Had n't she another fan, or could n't the bouquet be divided? Mrs. St. John said she would allow

him to button her glove; and his face glowed with joy at her condescension.



Tom made so many mistakes in the "Lancers" that Leslie could not keep him in order. She tried to dance a cotillion with the "defender of his country," as Mr. MacVickar styled the handsome little innocent from West Point; but she laughed so often at her own mistakes,

that her partner became a little vexed, and thought that she was laughing at him. What in creation had her family been thinking of, not to teach her to dance! He shuddered at the thought of such ignorance in a civilized and Christian country, and wished he had his shiny buttons back.

Mrs. Morris, who peeped in through the windows from the piazza, wondered how it happened that the people all looked like the very ones she had seen, season after season, at hotel

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

hops. There were the weary old ladies, who hid their yawns behind their fans, and who only served as stations to run the young ladies back to. They looked so much alike, that Miss Annie or Miss Fannie had to say, as her escort confidently took her to the wrong old lady, "Oh, no, this one is not my mamma!"

The music was fine; and, as Tom and Leslie had come to grief in their dancing, they went again to the piazza, passing on their way Mr. MacVickar, who said, —

"What! going to add two other stars to night?"

"A hop is n't as nice as I thought it would be," said Leslie, wrapped up in somebody's shawl, which Tom had pilfered on his way out. "If it really meant its name, I'd like it. I like to laugh when I dance, and to feel that I am having a good time. All those people looked so solemn, and as if they were to blame. It made me laugh to see them."

"There is only one thing that is nice about a hop, to me," said Tom; "and that is to walk on the piazza in the moonlight, with the music and the sound of the sea in my ears, and a pretty girl who" —

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"How do you do, Miss Leslie!" said Mrs. Morris from the shadow. "Are you enjoying the hop? I must thank you for rescuing me to-day from those little Stevensens. When I have a headache, their shrill voices scalp me. And those tin carts! They are instructed to trundle them under my window, I'm convinced. Why do they never play under their mother's?"

Leslie laughed, and introduced Tom to the lady; and then Mr. Tilesen came, pale and timid, to remind Miss Leslie that she had promised to promenade with him, as she did n't waltz.

Tom wanted to slap the little fellow between his hands, like a mosquito. It did n't seem like murder to kill any thing so thin.

The supper hall was bright with flags. To Leslie's fresh eyes, it was like a scene in the "Arabian Nights." With her, it was the Thousand and One Nights all in one; for Tom had walked boldly up to little Mr. Tilesen, and offered Leslie his arm as if she belonged to him, and Leslie had taken it as if she did. Mr. Tilesen had let her go, smiling feebly, and then wondered why he had let her go.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom was splendid. He found just the things Leslie liked, and sent a waiter with them to the piazza, where they had "another little tea-party." Leslie said this was "just for twice;" and what a queer, lovely, funny, dreadful time that other tea-party in the country was! and now, with her pretty clothes, she felt like a girl in a story, and he was like a gentleman in a story.

"The hero and heroine?" asked Tom.

Leslie laughed, and said, "No: there is an elegant young lady whose initials are 'G. H.,' who is the heroine."

"And a man, called Tilesen, is the hero for the other lady, perhaps," said Tom.

Leslie said that if he were to belong to her, she would put a dress and bonnet on him, and call him Miss Tilesen.

"I'm tired, Leslie," said little Clarence, running up to her, and laying his head on her shoulder. "Won't you take me to bed? I'm afraid, in this big house, and I can't keep awake any longer."

"Where is Pomp?" asked Tom. "He'll put you to bed."

"I want Leslie," said Clarence, defiantly.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie arose.

"I'll put him to bed, and then come back," she said. But it was a long time before she came, for Clarence wanted a song and a story; and then it was time for Mrs. St. John to be tired, and so Leslie had to go with her, of course.

"Don't sing any of your songs to these fellows here," said Tom, in a low tone, as he bade her good-night, nodding over his shoulder into the ball-room. "Save them for another 'just for this time,' won't you?"

"Yes," said Leslie. And then she gave him her little hand, and said, "Good-night;" and Tom saw her white dress sweep up the stairs.

He decided that he was tired enough to go in now.

It is surprising how the music clashes, how the lights grow dim and the people stupid, the minute "the only girl in the world" is taken away by her hard-hearted chaperone.

But there was a morning coming.



VIII

THE next morning Mrs. St. John told Pomp to keep the boys away from Leslie and Tom; but the poor old fellow had his hands more than full to obey her orders.

Wilfrid and Clarence viewed Tom with that intense admiration which boys so often feel for a "grown-up fellow;" and Arthur looked on him tenderly as Bessie's brother, and amused Mr. Morris by saying that he knew how Tom felt,—he had been there himself.

Leslie and Tom sat on the breezy side of the broad piazza, away from the group of ladies who had their fancy-work out and were listening to Mrs. Stevens as she read aloud.

"I am afraid I am very lazy," said Leslie, looking at her idle hands; "but I don't seem to care for fancy-work, and I have no real work to do. Pomp does the mending."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"There's a great deal of nonsense about fancy-work," said Tom. "I think it is far more sensible to sit still and do nothing, than to play at work in that way. Gertrude Henderson bears off the palm for that sort of thing. I'm glad Bessie never took to it. You are the kind of girl that would take hold of real work, and do it well, if you needed to. Any thing you were interested in, and thought you ought to do, you would do."

"Would I?" said Leslie, very much pleased with Tom's discovery. "Oh, I'd rather have you say that than any thing! I'd like to be just like Bessie. She makes such lovely cake and jelly; and she trims her own bonnets; and then she can play on the piano and speak French, besides. The only thing I can do is hoe-cake," she added. "I've seen Pomp make that times enough to know how. But I can only play on the" — She stopped and blushed.

"On what?" asked Tom, smiling. "On a jewsharp, or an accordion? Out with it, Miss Leslie."

"On something worse," she replied. "But I don't want to let you know: you'll think it so unlady-like."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"You could n't do any thing unlady-like," said Tom, looking into her eyes.

"Well, then," said Leslie, "I sing negro songs with the banjo."

Tom burst out laughing.

"Is that all?" he asked. "You must bring your banjo out, when we go back to town, and sing for me. Why, I'd rather have my — I'd rather hear you sing with a banjo than any thing I can think of in the way of music."

"Oh, would you?" said Leslie, much relieved. "I thought you would think it was dreadful. I will sing for you as much as you like. I know heaps of songs."

Clarence appeared at this moment, dragging a chair after him, and stationed himself in front of them, saying nothing, but gazing earnestly into their faces. He fairly stretched his eyes open so as not to wink, for fear of losing something.

From a conversation he had heard between his mother and Pomp, he had gathered that something remarkable was to happen that morning, and he meant to be "in at the death."

Just now Pomp peeped round the corner of the piazza.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Massa Clar'nce," he called, in a loud whisper, "I wants to speak to yer."

"You don't neither," said Clarence. "You want to get me in, and I sha'n't go."

"I'se got some cake fur yer."

"I don't want your old cake! You need n't roll your old eyes round at me! I ain't doing any thing, am I, Leslie? You think Leslie don't want me to hear her talk with Mr. Douglas. They ain't talking about any thing but music, are you, Leslie?"

Poor Leslie! She did not know what to say.

"Clarence, come here. I want to speak to you," called his mother.

"I ain't doing any thing to them," he replied, in a fretful voice.

The ladies at the other end of the piazza exchanged glances, and smiled.

"Clarence, come to me this moment!" Mrs. St. John's voice was getting a little shrill.

Clarence rose, dragging his feet heavily after him, and pouting.

"I can't hear a word they say, — not a single word," he whimpered. "He did n't come down just to see Leslie, I'll bet: did you, Mr. Douglas?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"No, I came to see you," said Tom; "and, if you had stayed on that chair a little longer, I should have been able to see a good deal of you. Come here, I want to speak to you."

Tom's whispered communication had the desired effect, for Clarence soon disappeared in the bowling-alley.

The little boy whom he paid, with unusual liberality, for setting up the pins, asked him if that "city swell" was his uncle.

Clarence said no, but he guessed he would be, pretty soon, when he married Leslie.

"He'll be your cousin, then," said the boy.

"He won't either," replied Clarence: "he's too old to be my cousin, I tell you. Leslie's my cousin."

Soon Tom and Leslie set out for a walk.

"Mr. Douglas!" Clarence called out. "What kind of a walk are you going on, — a long one or a short one?"

"Oh, a *very* long one," said Tom, in a tone of discouragement.

"Then I'll go with you," said Clarence, cheerfully. "That's just the kind of a walk I want to take."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Hallo! Massa Clar'nce," cried Pomp. "Yer ma says how she wants yer. She's got suthin' fur yer."

Clarence was becoming wrathful under this constant surveillance, to which he was not accustomed. He aimed a stone at Pomp, who beat a hasty retreat.

At this moment, Wilfrid, who was driving with a stable-boy, saw the party, jumped out of the carriage, and joined them.

"Clarence, come along!" he whispered. "I want to tell you something. Say, we'll make fun of them."

Tom had put Leslie's hand through his arm, and now Wilfrid offered his arm to Clarence. He leaned toward him, he whispered to him, and finally Tom and Leslie were startled by a series of loud kisses behind them.

They turned in time to see the little rascals "taking them off."

Tom was angry, but he could n't help laughing. Wilfrid was looking very stern, and Clarence was mincing his steps, "lady-fashion," and had his mouth pursed up: "like Leslie's," he said.

Poor Leslie was almost crying.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Don't mind the boys," said Tom. "What do we care for their nonsense?"

After this there were no butterflies to chase, no birds to stone. The boys walked beside the two young people, paying strict attention to every word.

Tom thought the Evil One had engaged their services for that morning.

Late in the afternoon there was to be a sailing-party.

They all went down to the wharf, and stood about, waiting while Uncle Peter was hoisting his sail.

Leslie knew Uncle Peter. He lived in a neighboring fishing village, with his daughter-in-law, Lany. His business in summer was to take the hotel people out on the water in his boat, which he called the "Mary Adny," after a boat he had heard of which "beat" in a Fourth of July race "down to New Bedford."

Leslie was a great favorite of his. She was



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

never sea-sick, and she never screamed in the boat.

Mr. MacVickar was the general escort. Little Mr. Tileson flirted with Miss Wilder, to make Leslie jealous; but he only made her grateful.

Tom had provided money for Wilfrid and Clarence to go to the village for fishing-rods and lines, and had thus procured a quiet afternoon for himself, and frustrated the plans of the arch-enemy.

Miss Wilder wore a white veil, which reached to her nose, white gloves, a blue flannel dress trimmed with broad white braid, — that was the sailor part of the costume, — and carried a parasol lined with pink. She held a larger veil, in which to entwine her head when she should fairly have set sail, lest a sunbeam or a breeze should strike her too roughly.

Leslie's sailor hat was pushed off from her face: it was certainly very little protection to her.

"Why don't you follow that young lady's example," asked Tom, in an undertone, "and wear a veil, to save your complexion?"

"Oh, I love to feel the wind," replied Leslie.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I can't breathe with a veil on. I only get a little darker: that does n't matter. Miss Wilder is a grand young lady, — she 's a belle, they say, — and I am — only Leslie."

She said this so sweetly, that Tom wanted to embrace her on the spot, though the assembled world should behold; but he was prevented by an armful of shawls and parasols, not to mention the opera cloak, which Pomp at the last moment had slyly intrusted to his charge, "so as Miss Leslie won't cotch no cold when de night damps comes along;" and, besides, Leslie had already jumped aboard.

The boat was rather crowded. So, after they had pushed off, Leslie and Tom went up before the mast, where there was just room for two to stand.

The air was sweet; there was a fresh breeze. The "Mary Adny" flew along as well as if her name had been spelled right. The little reefing-lines, striking on the sail, made a sound like light rain. The pennant fluttered.

Where were care and trouble! Not a cloud was in the sky. It was a summer sea.

"Play there is no one here, and sing that little sea song," said Tom, — "the first one I

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

ever heard you sing. What a dear little song that is! This is just the place for it."

" 'There was a little white cloud in the sky,' "

sang Leslie.

Instantly there was quiet in the party.

"Why, what a lovely song that is, Miss Leslie!" cried Mr. MacVickar, when she had finished it, clapping with one of his forefingers upon the other. "Why have we never heard that siren voice before?"

"You could hear it any time," said Leslie, "if you listened at the door when I put Clarence to bed. I sing to him every night."

"And why waste on that *small* boy what *some larger* boys would purchase dearly?"

Leslie laughed.

"O Miss Wilder," she said to the young lady with the pink parasol, "do sing! I heard you one night in the parlor, when you did not know I was listening."

"Oh, do!" they all urged.

But Miss Wilder could not be persuaded.

"Oh, I never sing before strangers," she said. "I sometimes warble a few wild notes for Papa. That is all."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Then they begged Leslie to go on.

She sang several songs, until Tom said she would injure her voice in the open air.

"Leslie," whispered Mrs. Morris, "stir Uncle Peter up. Make him talk."

Very little "stirring" brought him to the surface.

"Was n't it hot this morning, Uncle Peter!" said Leslie, turning around to him.

"Wal," said he, "it wa'n't what I call hot. Ef yer 'd ben in the terrid zone, when yer felt as ef yer was in a biler o' hot water all day, yer 'd know what hot was.

"Folks is more contr'y on weather 'n on any thin' else. When it's hot, they want it cold; an' when it's cold, they want it hot. I s'pose they 'd like it lewkwarm all the time."

"What do you call cold weather, Uncle Peter?" asked Tom.

"I call cold weather when yer wear a coat o' ice all over yer, every one o' the hairs on yer head's an eyecicle, an' ye'r sort o' cased in ice."

"Where in the world did you get covered in that way? In the North Sea?" asked Mrs. Morris.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak



"No, marm. It was down to Nantucket, when I was a young feller. I went out to help git men off a sinkin' ship, an' that's the way I looked when I got home. I looked putty queer, the wimmin-folks said."

"Did you save the men?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Eight."

"How many men went with you, Uncle Peter?"

"Two, — my father an' my brother."

"Was n't it dangerous?"

"Yes."

"And you saved the lives of eight men! It was a shame the Humane Society did n't give you a medal."

"They did! Bob yer heads, — bob yer heads, — the sail's goin' over," said Uncle Peter.

It was a fine place where

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie stood with Tom. They did not have to notice the sail, and it seemed as if they two, standing side by side, impelled the boat forward, and were going on and on, up the shining track, into a land of sunshine.

"Oh," said Leslie, taking a long breath, "I should like to be a sailor. Should n't I make a good sailor, Uncle Peter?"

"Oh, splendid!" said he, with a scornful laugh. "Yer would n't want to go more 'n one crewse, I cal'late. How long would yer stick it out on a wrack! How would yer like gittin' soaked through, for one thing?"

"Oh, I don't mind that! I've tried it," said Leslie, looking at Tom, and laughing.

"She would n't make no kind of a fisherman, anyhow," said Uncle Peter, addressing the company. "The day she went blew-fishin', she a'most cried 'cause I hed n't a hetchet to cut off the fishes' heads 'fore I pitched 'em into the berril. She's drefful tender-hearted. She could n't never put no bait on."

"I could bait for frogs," said Leslie, laughing, "because they use red flannel for that."

"Sho!" said Uncle Peter. "That ain't so! I never heered on to it."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I think the very wickedest and meanest thing I ever heard," said Leslie, earnestly, "is the way they shoot gulls. They have a boat sunk close down to the water's edge, near the shore, and they put branches all around it to make it look like the ground; and then they wave a white handkerchief to the poor birds, who think it is a friend that wants to speak to them, and they come hurrying down out of the sky, and, just as they get near, the great horrid man jumps up out of his hiding-place and shoots the poor things."

"I wonder if 'gulling' people comes from that?" asked Mrs. Morris.

"Undoubtedly it comes from something," said Mr. MacVickar, "and why not from that?"

"Now we are going to run through the narrows into a bay," said Leslie, "and up to an old wharf. Such a funny place! Did you ever eat ice-cream on the roof of a house, Mr. Douglas?"

"No," said Tom. "But I've eaten it on the floor of a house."

"Of course you have; but that is a very dif-

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

ferent thing from the roof, under an awning, looking off, far, far off to sea."

Soon the party landed, and went merrily up the rocks to a little saloon. The ladies insisted on taking their shawls and wraps from the boat, for fear they might be stolen if the old man should go ashore.

Uncle Peter sniffed with scorn.

"Mebbe this wharf or the fish-houses 'll walk out and kerry 'em off," said he, with awful sarcasm. "I'd better set here an' watch 'em, hed n't I?"

"Uncle Peter does n't like that," whispered Leslie to Tom. "He lives in this village. That's his house over there, and all the people are his relations, and such nice people! No one ever steals. Why, I'll leave all my things in the boat, and I shall feel safe if Uncle Peter does go away from it."

They had now reached the saloon.

"Oh!" said Mr. MacVickar, while the man was dusting the tables, and bringing on very yellow and very pink ice-creams; "I always think, when looking on the sea, —

'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, — roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain,'"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and he waved his hand toward Uncle Peter's boat;

“‘Man marks the earth with ruin—his control’”—

here he turned toward the saloon:—

“‘his control—

Man marks the earth with ruin—his control’”—

“Stops with the shore,” said Tom, patching out the verse.

“Yes,” said Mr. MacVickar; “and very true it is,—beautifully true!”

Leslie was so proud that Tom could help him out. What had n't he read!

The “ice-cream man,” as Mr. Tilesen called him, brought a plate of fresh doughnuts covered with powdered sugar.

“What an odd thing to eat with ice-cream!” said Miss Wilder, taking a third one, and dusting the sugar from her dress.

“A wisp-broom ought to go with each one of these cakes,” said little Tilesen.

They laughed, for they were all brushing away at their clothes.

“Pretty good, Mr. Tilesen,” said Mr. MacVickar,—“very good indeed, sir!”

Mr. Tilesen thought at once that he would

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

have the cook at home make some cakes of this kind the next time they had company, and that he would get off that bright joke again.

Tom looked at his watch.

"I think we'll have to leave now, if I am to catch my train," said he. "I might get Uncle Peter to run me up, and let him come back for you."

"Oh, no: we are ready," they all said.

"Why must you go to-night?" asked Mr. MacVickar.

"I have an engagement in town," said Tom.

"You are a man of engagements," said Mr. MacVickar, pointing his remark by a very quiz-zical face.

"Fool!" said Tom to himself, as he returned the look without one gleam of intelligence.

Leslie had a little pitcher in her hand, when she came out of the saloon.

"What in the earth is that?" asked Tom, taking the pitcher from her. "Are you going to carry this to your aunt? It will melt before you are half there."

"Oh, no," said Leslie. "It is for Uncle Peter. I think he feels sort of lonely in the boat, all by himself."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"You are a dear, good girl," said Tom. "You are always thinking of other people. I wish I was Uncle Peter."

"Oh, you need n't wish that," said Leslie, shyly. "I'll buy *you* some ice-cream, sometime, if you care so much for it. Will you have pink or yellow; and will you eat it from a pitcher?"

"I believe you are a little wicked," said Tom: "just enough to keep you from flying away."

"That sounds like Mr. MacVickar," said Leslie. "He is always expecting ladies to spread their wings, — even Mrs. Stevens, who would need very strong ones; and we always rival the stars; and he says something about —

'O woman! in our hours of ease.'

Tom thought of the next line, — how it fitted Mrs. St. John; and then of himself, with a terrible headache, and Leslie's soft hands on his head.

"Wal," said Uncle Peter, catching sight of the ice-cream; "hain't yer hed enough, but yer must fetch a pitcher-full aboard?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"That's for you," said Leslie. "You might have gone up for some just as well as not. Nobody would have hurt your boat."

The rest had now come up.

"No," said Uncle Peter, still displeased about the suspicions of theft. "One lady left her rubber, an' o' course I did n't darst to quit while that was here: it might hev ben stole. I see Deacon Soule sort o' spyin' round."

Mrs. Morris and Leslie laughed heartily. They knew Deacon Soule by sight, — a very solemn-looking man, his hair all brushed up to the top of his head, and braided in a flat little braid, which looked as if some one had got inside of his head to arrange it.

Uncle Peter ate the ice-cream with a relish, and then set the pitcher and spoon on the wharf, where the owner was to find them, — "Ef Deacon Soule don't ketch sight on 'em fust," said Uncle Peter, grimly, as he pushed off.

They did not notice that the precious opera cloak had fallen from the gunwale, where Leslie had left it, and drifted to the shore, near by.

The sun was low. The sky was one glow of gold and rose color, — a burning rose, that glorified the sky and water, and lent a rich tint

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

to the trees, whose heavy reflection trembled below.

“ ‘Where the reflections, clear and strong,
Fall like an echo to a song,’ ”

said Mrs. Morris.

Leslie wished she could quote. She meant to read, and learn things by heart, so as to be able to do it. Everybody else could quote; and she felt quite ashamed.

Quiet fell upon the little party. The lapping of the water on the side of the boat was pleasant to the ear.

Tom trembled lest some one should suggest “Good-night, ladies!” or “Soft o’er the fountain.”

Mr. Tileson and Miss Wilder stood for the figure-heads, this time. Leslie and Tom sat in the stern.

“Oh!” cried Leslie. “Look at the little village. It is all gold!”

A star burned on the steeple of the church, and the village windows were aglow with the setting sun. The houses were dark against the yellow light. The little town was transfigured.

Leslie sighed with delight.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Suddenly she put her hand on Uncle Peter's, as he held the tiller.

"Stop!" she cried. "See! Wait! There's a man in the water!"

They all started to their feet.

"I don't see none," said Uncle Peter, looking back. "Wher is he? I guess he'd holler, 'f he wanted help."

"Maybe he can't," said Leslie.

"Where is he? Where is he?" they asked, all at once.

"Why, there!" Leslie pointed. "In the little cove, where we ran in. See! he is trying to pull himself up by some bushes. I can see his arms move."

"Perhaps it's Deacon Soule, after the spoon," said Tom.

Leslie looked reproachfully at him. There were tears in her eyes.

Uncle Peter wanted to get home to supper.

"I'll holler," said he. "An' ef he don't holler back, I think he oughter be drowned."

Uncle Peter put his hand to his mouth, and called, —

"Hallo! Who be yer? Hallo!"

No answer.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Tom was in a great hurry to get back, so as to have a little talk with Leslie before he went to his train; for he had something on his mind, and wanted to get it off. And what chance had he had that day?

"Those boys!" he said to himself. "And that confounded old cloak, last night! *That* just spoiled my chance. If Uncle Peter should go back now, the last hope would be gone. I could barely catch the train."

But he could not resist Leslie's: "Please make him go back. Please, — please do."

"Come, Uncle Peter," said Tom, "I'll give you half a dollar if you'll turn back. But you have got to hurry."

"Oh, you *must* go back!" cried the ladies, trembling. "You must, Uncle Peter!"

"Why, the idea of leaving a man in that situation!" said Mrs. Morris. "It will never do. I should feel like a murderer."

"But, maybe, he has just slipped in, and is pulling himself out," said Mr. MacVickar, who dreaded the night air on his rheumatic shoulder. "Let the boat lie still until we see."

The figure remained quiet for a few seconds, and then struggled wildly.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Nobody can't drownd there," said Uncle Peter, "'nless he tries to. It's shoal in the cove. I do believe it's a boy tryin' to scare us. Hallo!"

"Who be yer? Who be yer?" he called again.

"Be yer?" echoed from the cliff.

Uncle Peter was very indignant that the man would n't "holler."

"Perhaps he's deaf," said Leslie.

"Or dumb," said Miss Wilder.

"Or contr'y," said Uncle Peter.

"Well, we will go back and see," said Tom. "That's our business now." And Leslie's grateful smile fully repaid him.

"Why don't he get up?" asked Mrs. Morris. They were all straining their eyes. "I should think he could. He has hold of the bushes."

"Perhaps they give way when he pulls," said one of the party. "Sometimes he gets tired, and only holds on. Perhaps he fell into the water, and is faint."

"Why don't he holler, then?" asked Uncle Peter, keeping to his grievance. "Time to holler is when you want suthin'."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

The light was fading; the shadows deepened in the little cove.

Miss Wilder was faint.

"Will he have to be brought into the boat, if he is dead?" she asked, with horror in her tone.

"Wonder nobody ain't stole him," said Uncle Peter, sarcastically, "along o' the pitcher!"

Tom could hardly help laughing; but Leslie looked so solemn that he did not dare to. Besides, there the poor fellow was, struggling in the water.

As the boat rounded into the cove, Tom sprang up on the little cabin, and, holding on by the mast, bent down, ready to catch the drowning man.

A sudden breeze swept over the bay. The man threw up his arms wildly. There was a flapping of something red.

A shout went up from the boat. Tom leaned over, and pulled on board the "drownded man," — O. C. St. John, Esquire.

"It is that old cloak of Mrs. St. John's," cried Mrs. Morris, laughing. "Now, Uncle Peter, you see why he could n't 'holler.'"

Leslie put her face in her hands. She was

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

ready to cry with shame. She had delayed them all, and Tom would be vexed about losing his train. But no one cared: it was an adventure.

"I expected to help pull him in," said Mrs. Morris, "and lay him on his left side, — no, on his right, — which side is it that you lay drowned people on? — and get a medal. That's all I mind, and I shall look to you for it, Leslie, because he belongs to you."

Uncle Peter's good-nature was restored when Tom slipped the promised coin into his hand.

"When I thought it was a man," said he, confidentially, "I was mad to hev him sich a fool, — would n't holler! But, when I see it was a cloth cape, I thought it was a pretty smart cape, to make out he was a man."

Leslie looked over the side of the boat, and trailed her hand along in the water. Tom wrapped a shawl about her, which Mrs. Morris had handed him, and let his hand slide from her shoulder until it touched hers lightly.

"Don't mind," he whispered. "It was nothing at all: they all think it is funny."

"Don't be vexed with me," said Leslie, "if you lose your train. If it had really been a man, you would n't have minded."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"That's all right. There's plenty of time. Vexed with you, Leslie! How could I be?" Tom whispered in return.

"Come, listen," said Mrs. Morris: "I'm going to tell a story.

"Once upon a time there was a lady, a young lady, who was so anxious to procure a medal from the Humane Society, that one day she hired a boat, and invited a large party of friends to aid her in searching for a shipwrecked mariner. So out they went upon the ocean, — Mr. MacVickar's deep and dark blue ocean," —

"Byron's, madam," said Mr. MacVickar: "I cannot claim that fine apostrophe."

Mrs. Morris opened her eyes at Tom.

"Well," she continued, "upon Byron's deep and dark blue ocean, on a fine summer afternoon. The first thing they discovered, with mingled feelings, was a floating object. Tears filled their eyes, grief their bosoms. It was a man and a brother. They neared him; they thought of the medal; they reflected that 'he was some mother's son.'

"Suddenly it was discovered that it was nothing but an old cloak; and then, when joy

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

should have possessed them, they fell a prey to sadness. For, ah, where was the medal!

"The others quickly recovered; but this young lady could not be comforted. She leaned so far over the boat that an elderly lady, her friend, was obliged to entreat a young gentleman to hold her in. I don't wish to be personal; but, Mr. Douglas, don't let the lady with the Rob Roy shawl fall into the water."

Leslie laughed. She knew that Mrs. Morris had told the silly little story to divert her, and, perhaps, too, to show her that she was making too much of the affair. She took the lesson, if such it was, and smiled.

"I think you are very kind, not to be vexed," she said. "I'm afraid you will all lose your suppers, and that Mr. Douglas will miss his train, for the tide is running out."

"Yes," said Uncle Peter; "but ain't I got my oars aboard, an' ain't I got two arms? Nobody won't lose no suppers nor nothin', I bet, to-night."

The tide had run out, however, so much that they had to go ashore in a "skift," as Uncle Peter called it, two at a time.

"You go first, with Leslie, Mr. Douglas,"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

said Mrs. Morris. "Trains won't wait, and suppers will."

Tom blessed her. Perhaps he would get his chance yet.

They stepped into the skiff. Uncle Peter sculled them to the wharf, and left them. A stable-boy was waiting there.

"Did you want to ketch the train?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom, "I must."

"Well, I've had the horse harnessed ever so long, a-lookin' for you. I thought you'd be too late. We'll have to hurry like sixty."

"Go up," said Tom. "I'll come."

He took Leslie's hand in a firm, close grasp.

"Good-by," he said.

"All ready!" called the boy.

"Good-by, Miss Leslie. I'll be down again soon. Don't forget me. Promise!"

"I'll promise," said Leslie, softly.

"You'll git left!" called the boy.

"Good-by!" said Tom again. "There comes the skiff. Good-by!"

As soon as they reached the house, Mrs. St. John called Leslie upstairs. She had been watching for the party.

"So Mr. Douglas caught his train," said she,

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

shutting the door of her room. "Well, Leslie, did he make you an offer?"

"No."

"Well, I declare; and after all the pains I have taken to keep those boys away, and plan this sail, and invite him here, he has slipped away in the dark! I don't believe he had any engagement in town: he did n't care to face me, after such dishonorable conduct. I reckon he'd have done differently, if the Colonel had been here. I wish he'd just met up with him."

Leslie said nothing.

"Why don't you speak?" said Mrs. St. John, displeased at her silence. "How much more did you want me to do?"

"Nothing," said Leslie.

"Nothing!" repeated Mrs. St. John. "I wonder how much would be done in the world, if no one did any thing! I've spent days and days in planning for you, and I live to hear you say you want 'nothing' from me. Perhaps Mr. Douglas did n't have time, you will say. How long would it take him to ask, 'Will you marry me?'"

"I don't know," said Leslie, crying.

"Well, I do," said her aunt: "about half

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

a minute; and he had twenty-four hours for it."

Leslie felt as if she had a sum to do: if a man can offer himself in a half minute, how many times can he offer himself in twenty-four hours?

She was utterly miserable.

There was a knock at the door. Mr. MacVickar wished to know if Mrs. St. John was not coming down.

"Certainly," said Mrs. St. John. "I am coming down before long."

In the parlor, she heard the story of the shipwrecked mariner.

"We may safely say," she remarked, "that there was one of this party who did n't mind being delayed, and would gladly have lost his train. Poor Leslie, I do believe she will have to marry Mr. Douglas, whether or no. He is so determined. I never saw a man so in love in all my life."

Tom was rather low-spirited as he rolled away over the country road. He had been frustrated at every turn. He wished the old opera cloak had been drowned for good. "I

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

believe the Evil One left the boys, and entered it, — that is, if it is n't the very Evil One himself," said Tom. "I thought at one time O. C. St. John was favoring me, to Mr. Cavello's discomfort; but he has gone against me now. He's making a clear coast for some other fellow. Mrs. St. John said Merrill was very attentive to her. Of course. Why not? And he has the inside track.

"I wish I had pushed those boys and their cloak into the sea last night. Gracious! That was a chance, if they had n't spoiled it. It was on my lips that minute."

Poor Tom smiled a grim smile.

"Well, it's a queer world. I wonder how all this is coming out."

What a change it was to sit in the dreary car with twoscore strange people, where the lamps burned dimly, but smelt strongly.

Was it less than an hour since he held Leslie's hand!

Tom looked out of the window. The moon was sailing through light clouds. Happy moon! It was looking down on Leslie.



IX

THE morning was delightfully cool; the sea sparkled in the sun with a brilliant and dazzling brightness, "which could only be caught," said the young lady who sketched, "by using coarse paper, and scratching little specks of paint off after the ocean had been all washed in."

A group of old apple-trees near the hotel, gnarled and covered with yellow lichens, bent toward the land, bowed by the sea-winds of many winters.

The gulls fluttered, and poised themselves over the water in scattered flocks.

The far-off ships stood like phantoms on the horizon's rim. The atmosphere seemed to tremble and vibrate.

The morning could not have been finer, if Mrs. St. John had made it herself. She had

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

approached the feat, as nearly as possible, by setting the day apart for a clam-bake; and she complacently received the compliments of the party, as she sat in a Shaker chair on the piazza, after breakfast.

Mr. MacVickar sat beside her. He was quite in accord with the day. He wore a light flannel suit and a Panama hat.

The piazza was filled with ladies, busied with the pleasant flurry of "getting off."

Leslie stood by the steps, with an armful of shawls. The boys came hopping toward her like frogs.

"Say, Leslie," said little Clarence, "the people who hired the big carriage yesterday did n't bring it back, and the picnic has got to go in the little ones. I'm jolly glad of it, for I shall drive one horse."

"No, you won't either," retorted Wilfrid. "They would n't trust you with any horse except a saw-horse."

"They would, too," said Clarence. "I'll bet I could drive a tandem team that could run lickerty split, and smash every thing to pieces, — so, there!"

The carriages came to the door. The people

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

who were going to the clam-bake stood about waiting for Mr. MacVickar, who was the leader, and who had promised to sing at dinner a song about a young lady who drank only with her eyes.

He was in high feather to-day, for all the younger beaux had gone to the city, and the papas and husbands were glad to throw the care upon him.

The ladies took their novels and their fancy-work, — calico birds to be sewed on to dish-towels. Miss Nelson took her paint-boxes and brushes, a jar full of water, a sketching-block, a camp-stool, and a large white umbrella with a shining ball on the top. Her palette hung from her belt. Mr. MacVickar called her Art, and asked if Literature and Science would not join her at the clam-bake.

Mrs. St. John looked the carriages carefully over, selected the easiest, and seated herself in it.

At last they were ready to start, and there was no room for Leslie. Every one exclaimed, but no one offered to ride "three on a seat."

"Please don't mind me," said Leslie. "I am tired to-day: I rowed so hard yesterday. I'd

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

really rather stay at home. Do let me, Aunt Marie."

Mrs. St. John glanced around. She had the most room in her carriage: Leslie would fall to her share.

"Well," said she, smiling significantly at the company, and then at Leslie, "I suppose young ladies must have a little time to meditate and write long letters, once in a while."

"Ah, Miss Leslie," said Mr. MacVickar, rising and bowing, —

"Your heart's in the city,
Your heart is not here;
Your heart's in the city,
A-chasing your —

Oh!" he exclaimed, sitting down in a very forcible way, as the horses started. And away they all whirled, bowing, and calling "Good-by."

Tom had brought "Cousin Phillis" to Leslie. Oh, what a blissful day this would be to read it in! There was no one to bother her. Even Pomp had gone to the city in an early train, to get from the house something which her aunt had forgotten.

Leslie went to her room for the book; and, seeing the opera cloak hanging on a chair,

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

she took it, and, equipped with that and a large parasol, set off for a morning on the rocks.

She walked along the beach until she came to Cannon Rock, where she climbed to a seat which almost overhung the sea. She made the cloak into a cushion, propped the parasol up at her side, and took up her book.

But soon the bright pebbles enticed her to the beach. Tom had promised to have some polished for her for a necklace. What a necklace it would be, full of memories of the sky and of sea, and of this wonderful summer, and of Tom, above all!

She wandered along to a little wharf, where Uncle Peter sat, swinging his legs over the water. He was as brown and gnarled as the apple-trees: he would have been as yellow with lichens, had he sat still long enough. Almost every thing here was covered with lichens and moss.

The old man smiled on her as she approached, and said, "Hallo, Leslie!" with that Yankee independence which is so amusing. "Yer ain't lost nothin', hev yer? I see yer a-lookin' along the beach."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, no," she replied. "I was only getting some bright pebbles for a necklace."

Uncle Peter shook his head, and laughed scornfully.

"I never see en'thin' to beat city folks. They'll kerry away enough stuff, when they come here, to make an island. One 'oman paid me for fetchin' sea-weeds to her, an' she give me fifty cents for ten big hoss-foots. She was as partic'lar to hev whole tails on 'em, as they'd 'a' ben themselves when they was alive. I thought I should hev died to keep from laughin', when she was a-payin' me."

"Oh," said Leslie, "she wanted them for catch-alls. I have seen the ladies making them. They put a puff of crimson silk behind them, and bows of ribbon, and hang them on the parlor wall."

"Lor!" cried Uncle Peter, in utter astonishment. "Yer don't say so! I allers heave mine to the hog. But the most sing'lar thing that 'oman did," continued Uncle Peter, "was to hunt up clam-shells an' flat rocks, an' paint pictur's on 'em. I'll bet her trunk wa'n't no joke to h'ist, when she went off! But, then, no city trunks ain't, when they fust come. I've hefted 'em

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

sometimes, an' I should think they was allers full o' rocks."

"I think stones and shells are lovely," said Leslie. "I wish I could paint on them."

"I don't wish to speak dis'espec'ful o' shells," said Uncle Peter. "Why, I've picked up shells myself, when I was oft on a South Sea crewse. I scooped 'em up in my het to fetch home; but they wa'n't clam-shells, I can tell yer! They was all pink an' yeller, an' gold an' silver. I'll fetch yer a fistful to-morrer. Lany keeps 'em in bottles on the mantel-tree."

"Oh," said Leslie, "I should like them so much! I'd keep them always. But perhaps your daughter won't like to part with them. Is she better to-day?"

"I guess we'll fetch her round now," replied Uncle Peter. "But I thought she'd be hauled up, one time. Lany! why, she'd give 'em to yer herself. She don't set no store by 'em."

"The sun is so hot," said Leslie, "that I think I'll go back. I wish there were some trees along the shore, so that you could sail under them and anchor, and I could lie in the boat and read."

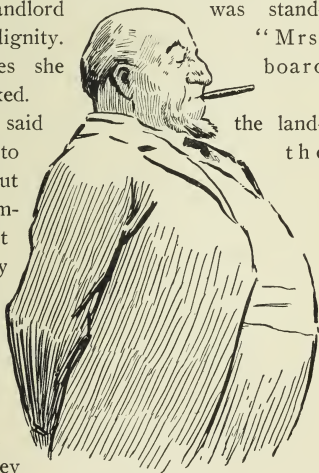
The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, trees ain't no good for shade," said Uncle Peter. "It's rocks that shades. I know a cove where we could run in an' be as cold as ice. I'll take yer there, ef yer want to go."

"Oh, do!" cried Leslie. "That will be lovely. I'll run back to the rock for my things."

A gentleman had driven up to the hotel door, where the landlord was standing in portly dignity. "Mrs. St. John, does she board here?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said the landlord, stepping to the buggy. "But the whole family, in fact most of my guests, have gone to a clam-bake. I don't expect them back till supper-time. I'm sorry they



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

are away, sir. You 'd better get out. Your horse looks as if he had had a long run."

The gentleman allowed a small boy, who appeared at this moment, to take his horse, and accepted the landlord's invitation.

"I tell you, sir," said Mr. Saunders, after they had seated themselves on the piazza, "it is n't often you come across a Southern family like the St. Johns, nowadays. They have four of my best rooms for the summer, and think no more of money than of just nothing at all, sir. They are very wealthy, as of course you know, if they are friends of yours. The young lady is an heiress, — untold wealth, in fact, I've heard, — and a very beautiful young lady she is. The young men are quite carried away with her. I believe she is to marry a young man from the city. He was down here a few days ago."

"Oh! his name, it was Mr. Douglas?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, that was his name. He came to attend our hop; and a very nice hop it was. You know him, I suppose?"

"Yes, I do know him."

"Well, sir, won't you walk in and look

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

at the newspapers? I am sorry they are away."

The red side of the opera cloak hung over the rock, and now caught the landlord's eye. At that moment, also, a lithe figure in dark blue appeared, far down on the beach.

"Why, that's Miss St. John, now! I thought she'd gone. I'll send a boy for her."

"No," said the stranger. "I will myself go for her. You may put my horse in your stable."

Mr. Cavello had been suspicious of Tom since the day he last saw him in Margrave Street. He was sure that Tom knew where the St. Johns had gone, although he had made believe he did not. After waiting in vain for an answer from the Colonel, he had turned his steps to the Doctor's, when he knew Tom would be at his office, to ask for Mrs. St. John's address. As he approached, he saw Ned playing on the sidewalk.

"How do you do, Mr. Cavello?" said the little fellow. "You didn't go to the beach with the rest of them, did you?"

"No, I have not gone yet; but I go now. I have lost the address. Can you tell it to me?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, yes, I know the place. I went there once last summer with Bessie. You can find it easy enough. Tom went there last week." And the child gave him over and over again the most careful directions, and sent his love to the boys.

Mr. Cavello walked off in high spirits. He would go to Mrs. St. John, and be very angry, and tell her that he was to fight the Colonel and young Mr. Douglas, and that he would revenge himself on them all; and he would marry Leslie. She should never marry Mr. Douglas.

Poor Mr. Cavello's heart was really touched. He had not known that he had one before, and it was a real pleasure to make the discovery.

What there was of it must have been good, for it was Leslie's sweetness and goodness which had won him. He had seen many more beautiful girls, but never one like her. Oh, if he could only carry her away to his plantation, away from everybody else, he would buy her the most beautiful jewels and dresses, and his slaves should wait upon her day and night; and a sense of something purer and finer than he had ever known filled his soul, until

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

he was lost in wonder and admiration of himself.

Leslie had picked up the cloak, the parasol and the book, and had begun to descend to the beach, merrily humming to herself, when she became conscious of some one approaching. Was it Tom? Her heart almost stopped beating. She looked up, and uttered a little cry.

Mr. Cavello raised his hat.

"Do not come down, Miss Leslie," he called. "It is I who will come to you. You have a fine place up there."

Leslie sat down in despair, and Mr. Cavello took his seat beside her, and held the sun-umbrella over them both.

They seemed very cozy and friendly, the landlord thought, as he stood looking at them from a distance, with his hands in his pockets.

Leslie was silent after the first greetings.

"I thought I would find where you had gone," said Mr. Cavello, fanning himself with his hat, his anger fading in Leslie's presence. "Why did you run away from me?"

"Oh, I did n't run away from you," said

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie, earnestly. She had felt ashamed at the way in which her aunt had treated him.

"I should have written you," she added, "and sent you the keys, only I did not know where you were. It was too bad: your clothes were all there."

"Oh, that was of little matter," said Mr. Cavello. "You know I had a room at the club, where I went with my friends, and I had other trunks there." Leslie's imagination was limited in respect of wardrobes. "But it was of your unkindness I was troubled."

"They are all away to-day," said Leslie, taking no notice of his remarks. "They have gone to a picnic, and Pomp is in the city. I am so sorry that I don't know where he keeps the keys; but I will send them to you."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Mr. Cavello. "I have money enough. I can buy as much clothes as I wish. I only used to stay at your aunt's, you know, because when my visit was done I could not go away from you. But you did not care. I had a beautiful gift for your aunt for letting me stay there; but she ran you all away."

Mr. Cavello did not mention the money he had lent the Colonel.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, you must not care for me," cried Leslie, in distress, the swift color rushing to her cheeks.

"But I cannot help to love you," said Mr. Cavello. "But I know very well you do not like me, and you do like some one else."

He looked so forlorn that Leslie's tender heart was touched.

"Oh, I do not say that, — I do not think, — nobody cares" —

"If there is nobody else, perhaps you will some time love me. I would get every thing for you that women like. I have plenty of money," said Mr. Cavello.

"That would not make any difference with me," said Leslie, gently. "I do not care for money, nor for diamonds, nor for any of the things Aunt Marie likes. If I should ever marry anybody, it would be just because I loved him, and not for what he had. I would marry him, if he was very, very poor, so that I should have to work hard all the time."

Leslie's slender hands were crossed upon her lap. Mr. Cavello touched them lightly.

"What work could such little hands do?" he said in a tender tone.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie shook off his hand as if it had been a viper.

"Oh, do not talk so to me!" she cried passionately, the tears starting to her eyes. "Am I not unhappy enough, with nobody to care for me, but that you must trouble me, too? I have no mother, like most girls. Aunt Marie does n't love me. I shall never marry anybody. Who would love me? Don't speak to me! Don't say a word!"

Mr. Cavello was startled. He had never seen Leslie so excited. She was lamenting that nobody loved her, and at the same time forbidding anybody to think of her.

"I will not say any more," said he, "if you will stop crying. If you cannot love me, will you not be my good friend always?" And he held out his hand.

The change in his tone comforted the girl.

"Oh, yes, I'll be your friend; but do not say such things to me any more."

"You will know," said Mr. Cavello, "that I am going away very soon. A week from to-day the steamer sails, and you will never see me any more, ever; and I should like to know you are my good friend, before I go. Will you do

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

me a last kindness, and go to a little drive with me?"

At the pleasant news of his speedy departure Leslie grew cheerful, and said kindly, —

"I'll go for a little while; but you must stay and dine with me. If you will wait until Aunt Marie comes home, I can get you the keys to-night."

She looked round to see the cause of the sudden change in Mr. Cavello's face.

"Hallo!" said Uncle Peter, his red face appearing over a rock. "Changed yer mind about goin' out, hev n't yer?"

Uncle Peter's curiosity had been too much for him. He thought he must have a look at that "queer chap" whom he had seen from afar.

"Found better company, hev yer?" said he, with an unrestrained wink at Leslie.

"This is a friend of my uncle's, from the city," she said. "I shall have to wait until some other day for the sail, unless," turning eagerly to Mr. Cavello, "you would rather sail than drive. It is so lovely on the water, and your horse must be tired."

She shrank from a *tête-à-tête* drive; but Mr. Cavello did not.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"My horse will be refreshed after dinner," he said.

"Some other day, then, Uncle Peter," said Leslie. "Don't forget my shells."

Mr. Cavello had some ideas of his own concerning himself and other people. He thought he was a very good-looking man, as, indeed, he was, for those who like that style. Then he thought he was a "great catch," with his fine plantation and plenty of money; and, for those who care for such things above all others, he certainly was. He believed any woman must be urged and coaxed and almost forced into saying "Yes." Leslie was only making believe. Why, he was very good to want to marry a girl who had not a cent; and that was a very pretty and complimentary speech she made about not marrying for money.

And so Mr. Cavello felt rather comfortable, upon the whole.

Leslie hoped he would forget the drive; but he ordered the horse before dinner, and, when they came out from the dining-room, the carriage was at the door.

The folded cloak and the parasol lay in a chair

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

on the piazza. Mr. Cavello gave them to Leslie, after she was seated.

She talked incessantly. She dreaded a silence. Mr. Cavello exerted himself to be entertaining by telling her about Cuba and the ways of living there, until Leslie thought Cuba must be the third heaven, to say the least. But she did not want to go there, if it was.

While Mr. Cavello described his plantation in glowing colors, Leslie was wishing this was the rainy night of that happy drive, and that Mr. Cavello was Tom.

"What a sad world this is!" thought the girl. "Here is poor Mr. Cavello liking me; and I like Tom; and Tom cares for nobody, unless, perhaps, for Miss Henderson. If Mr. Cavello had only fallen in love with Gertrude, who is fond of fine dresses and diamonds!" And Leslie's poor little brain was tired with trying to unravel the mysteries of life, as have been many wiser ones before.

She looked about her in surprise. "Why, Mr. Cavello," she said, "I never drove through this town. What is it? What a long drive we must have taken! It is four by that church clock."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I do not know the name of that town," he replied, "but I know my way. Did you think I had lost it?"

"Oh, no; only I think we had better turn back. Aunt Marie will want me when she comes home: Pomp is away, you know."

"You must not make yourself so very much to people," said Mr. Cavello, "that they cannot do without you."

"But Aunt Marie has always been waited on," said Leslie.

"Well, we will go home very soon," said Mr. Cavello, turning into another road. "Remember, this is my latest drive with you."

If sacrifice on her part could atone for rudeness on her aunt's, she felt that she had done her duty by Mr. Cavello.

"Why, Mr. Cavello," she cried, after a time, "what are we coming to? You have lost your way! There is no such large place near the hotel! Why, it is the city, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Cavello, "and I have brought you here on purpose; and, my dear Miss Leslie, I want to take you with me to my beautiful home, away from this cold place. You are young: you do not know about love. I will teach it to you.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

You shall be my queen, and I will be your slave. You say nobody does care for you here; and why do you stay?"

He spoke with warmth; he tried to take her hand. Leslie caught it away, and pressed against the side of the carriage. She was very much startled.

"I know," he cried, with passion, "it is Mr. Douglas you love; but you need not. He will marry the handsome young lady. I know he will marry her. And she hates you very much. I saw, I saw!"

It was true: Leslie felt it in her soul. It was nothing new that he had told her. Always, always, always she had known it.

"I have heard in the city that he marries her soon," said Mr. Cavello, improvising; and he added:—

"How will you stay here, while your aunt does not want you, and you have no money? Oh, come with me! I know a priest here: he is my great friend. We will go there, and be married; and away in my home you will be glad to forget this bad Mr. Douglas, who has tried to make you love him. I will fight him, if you should wish me."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Leslie tried to speak. Her voice would not come. She looked entreatingly at him. He would not understand: he could not. He thought she was considering: of course she would consent, after what she considered the proper amount of coquetting. His mind reverted to the numberless mammas who had tried to "lasso" him, and the daughters who had shot arrows by the quiverful. Surely, this poor little girl could not refuse so great a chance.

Wealth was not happiness, as Mr. Cavello knew; but that poverty and dependence meant unhappiness, he felt very sure, and he was aware that this girl had tasted them in their bitterness.

They were now in the heart of the city. People, glancing at the pretty girl and the dark Spaniard, thought them lovers on a pleasure drive. "Well, the world is smooth enough for some folks," they sighed, and passed on.

"Mr. Cavello," said Leslie, "do not say any more to me. You must let me get out. You surely don't wish to marry a girl who does n't love you."

"Yes, I do," said he, passionately. "You will like me by and by."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"No, I won't!" cried Leslie. "I shall hate you."

"Well, I cannot make you to marry me," said Mr. Cavello. "If I could, I would do it. Your aunt, she told me to marry you."

Leslie's cheeks flamed up. She did not feel like fainting now.

"Oh!" she cried, striking her hands together. "Why can't I work, like other people, and take care of myself! I must! I will! You say you are my friend, but it is not true. I am not your friend. I never want to see you again. Stop your horse! Let me get out! I must go home!"

"But listen to me," cried Mr. Cavello, holding her by the wrist: for Leslie had put her hands on the reins.

"Am I not a handsome man? Am I not a rich man? Am I not a young man? Do I not love you? What more do you want, in this long earth, in me?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," returned Leslie. "I'd as lief you were homely and poor and old."

"You would like me, if I was homely and poor and old. Well, I cannot make myself that," said he, "even to please you, Miss Leslie."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

You are a very strange young lady. Oh, what can I do to make you marry me? Tell me at once that you will. I am not in my way to beg young ladies to marry me. They do all wish to do it without it."

"Then go and marry them!" cried Leslie, now really frightened. "Stop! I must get out!"

Pomp, who had spent his day in the city, searching the attic for things which he finally found in the kitchen, and the parlor for things which he found in the attic, was slowly trudging along toward the depot, with bundles under each arm, when he saw a little boy running at full



speed past him, swinging at arm's length a blue cape lined with red.

Pomp had been too intimate with the Colonel's opera cloak not to know it when he met it; but how in the world had it got to the city? Pomp

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

flew after the boy, crying, "Stop, thief! Stop, thief!"

The boy turned up the first corner, and Pomp rushed after him. The street was blocked by carriages and horse-cars. Just as the boy reached the crowd, he dashed up to a buggy, and Pomp in another second had collared him.

"Miss Leslie," cried Pomp, looking into the carriage, "whar did yer come from?"

"O Pomp," cried Leslie. "Take me home!"

"Let me go!" cried the boy, shaking himself out of Pomp's unconscious grip. "I saw the lady lose the cape out of the carriage. 'T ain't yourn!"

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" said Leslie. She had no money to give the boy.

Mr. Cavello turned the horse's head suddenly, and started off in another direction. Pomp instantly sprang for the bridle, and clung to it with both arms, his legs tucked up under him in a ludicrous fashion.

Mr. Cavello was furious. He stood up and raised his whip to lash Pomp, when Leslie seized his arm and held it.

"Lift me out, Pomp!" she cried, and sprang to the ground, with the cape in her hand, leaving

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

the parasol as a souvenir for Mr. Cavello. It was very little, but it was something.

There was nothing more for Mr. Cavello to do.

Pomp picked up his scattered bundles, and Leslie and he took a horse-car for the depot, in as quiet and commonplace a way as if nothing unusual had occurred.

A train had just gone, and there was a long half-hour to wait for the next. The usual old man came around with soap to sell, and the usual old woman with pins and tape; people went in and out, and met their friends; an old lady was left, after waiting two hours for her train; and an old gentleman came just too late for his, and tried to get the ticket-office to open its inexorable window.

Leslie sat, dazed and wretched. What was life for? What was the use of living? Was it always to go on in this way? Oh, if she could only go away from them all, and never see them again, — just she and poor old Pomp! He was her only friend. If Tom cared anything for her, why did n't he take her away? Alas, he would never care about her. Had n't Mr. Cavello said so, and her aunt too? And was n't her heart beating "never, never, never"?

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

While Pomp and Leslie were waiting in the railway station, the picnic party returned. Mrs. St. John was tired and cross. The clams, according to the usual custom, had been either half-baked or burned, and the corn nearly raw. Mrs. Stevens's sister had flirted shamefully with Mr. MacVickar.

Mr. MacVickar himself wore a sort of dishevelled air. He had grass-stains on his light suit, as if he had wrestled too roughly with Nature. But the oak-wreath around his hat, and the corn-silk in his button-hole, gave him the look of a hard-pressed conqueror. It seemed unfair that the mild clam and unoffending maize should have given him the Bacchanalian look which he wore.

The young ladies, who had gone out with bewitching, fluffy crimps over their foreheads, had returned with little wisp brooms instead, — without the handles, of course: for no simile is to be run into the ground.

“Where is Leslie?” said Mrs. St. John, in a cross tone. “I should think Pomp might have got home by this time, at any rate. The most stupid day I ever knew in my life! Where can Leslie be!”

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Mr. Saunders passed her as she spoke.

“Oh, a gentleman, a Spaniard, I should think — I've forgotten his name, — called to see you. He dined with Miss St. John, and then took her to ride.”

“Mr. Cavello!” cried Mrs. St. John, in amazement. “How did he know where to find us! When will they come back?”

“I presume they'll be back to tea,” answered the landlord.

“Oh,” said Mrs. St. John, turning to the ladies, her spirits rising. “You should see Mr. Cavello! He is an immensely wealthy Cuban. Leslie's money is nothing compared to his. He would call her poor.

“The way that man haunted our house! I was afraid he and Mr. Douglas, who was here at the hop, would have a duel. I shall be thankful when that girl is once off my hands. Leslie's lovers are too much for one poor woman to look after.

“If Leslie and Mr. Cavello arrange it this afternoon, there will be another diamond wedding. ‘Signorina Fernando Cavello, *née* St. John,’ or whatever means ‘born’ in Spanish, would n't be bad on a card, would it?” said Mrs.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

St. John, looking triumphantly around upon the group of ladies.

"There ar'n't many girls," she went on, "who would n't have snapped such a catch up before; but she is so young and so attractive that she can afford to take time. She does n't have to swallow them whole." And here Mrs. St. John smiled sweetly and significantly on Mrs. Stevens's sister, who was by no means in her first youth.

The ladies, who had meant to sup in their picnic array, now decided to change their dresses, and were quite excited as they recrimped their hair by feeble candles. Mrs. Stevens's sister gave it up, and donned a jockey hat and a gay sack.

As soon as the tea-bell sounded, everybody hurried downstairs. They hardly dared to go to the table, for fear of missing the grand arrival; for, as this was the middle of the week, excitements were rare.

At last they went in, and watched, between mouthfuls, for Leslie and her gay lover.

"Dear me," said Mrs. St. John, "I am really getting anxious. I hope Mr. Cavello will not lose his way. I must order a hot supper kept for them."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

After tea, the ladies repaired to the piazza. They were too tired to talk. They listened to the crickets, who, never weary, except of silence, were chirping a quick reveille. The splash of the waves softened the sharp sound.

The light was beginning to fade, when, far down the road, appeared two figures, walking. Mrs. Stevens put up her eye-glasses. The people drew nearer.

"That looks like your niece, Mrs. St. John; but of course it can't be, — on foot."

"Hallo!" cried little Clarence, who was walking on the piazza railing: "there's Pomp and Leslie."

"It is no such thing, sir," said his mother. "Go to bed this moment. It must be Mr. Cavello. They have had an accident, I am sure."

Long seconds of waiting followed.

Mrs. Stevens put up her glasses again.

"It is your niece and your servant," she said. "I am afraid something has happened. But don't be anxious, Mrs. St. John. Miss Leslie is safe: she will explain all to us."

Pomp came up the side steps wearily, his arms full of bundles. Leslie's face was pale, and the traces of tears were about her eyes.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. St. John. "Is Mr. Cavello killed? Tell me at once."

"Nobody is hurt, Aunt Marie," said Leslie, in a strained voice. "Will you come to your room, please?"

"Well," said the ladies to each other, "there is something very queer here, — going on a drive, and walking home. If she refused the man, he might at least have brought her back. She must have expected him to-day: you know she did not want to go with us. And she came from the depot, too. There is something under all this, you may be sure."

Mrs. Stevens put up her eye-glasses and looked quizzically at the ladies' toilettes. A little laugh went round the circle. They had dressed, weary as they were, and had hurried through tea, for the pleasure of seeing Leslie St. John and old Pomp walk up the road.

One of the young ladies burst into a merry laugh, and it jarred on Mrs. St. John's ears as it floated in at her window.

"Well, Leslie," said she, sitting bolt upright on the hardest chair in the room, "what does this mean? Here I've ordered a hot supper

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

for you and Mr. Cavello; and there we were sitting, waiting to see you drive up in fine style, and, lo and behold, you come trudging along the country road with an old nigger. I don't wonder the ladies are laughing. Spiteful things!"

"O Aunt Marie," said Leslie, trembling so that she could not stand, "I'll tell you all about it." And she recounted the day's adventure, assisted in the last part by Pomp, who was undressing Clarence in the next room.

"If it had n't been for Pomp," said Leslie, "I don't know what I should have done."

"No, she would n't," cried Pomp. "When I see de Colonel's op'ra cloak rushin' froo de street, I fought de end ob de world am come. I called out to him, an' I run after him tell I ketched him. Ef it hed n't ben for dat op'ra cloak, I 'specs by dis time Miss Leslie would hev" —

"Be still, Pomp!" said Mrs. St. John.

"I was so frightened," continued Leslie, "I did n't know where we were."

"Yer did n't?" said Pomp, amazed. "Why, yer was in de city! Whar did yer think yer was?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I didn't know what part of the city we were in; and oh! he was so determined to make me go to a priest's with him, and get married."

"Well, for my life, I cannot see any thing so wonderful in this. A gentleman asks you to drive, and offers himself. I'm sure that was very honorable in him," said Mrs. St. John, sharply. "There are very few rich, fashionable young men who want to marry a poor girl without a cent to her name. I should think you were old enough to know how pleased your uncle would have been. I don't see how you could have refused such a chance."

"I wish I had married him, and then thrown myself into the sea," cried Leslie, with a flood of tears.

"Rather late in the day to repent now," said Mrs. St. John, sighing. "I'm sure I am only thinking of your prospects, Leslie. Well, it can't be helped now. I only wish Mr. Douglas was as anxious to get you. You would n't jump into the sea then, I reckon."

Leslie slipped away to her room, and cried herself to sleep.

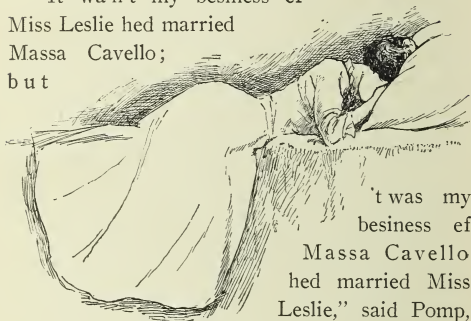
Mrs. St. John was very much displeased with

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Pomp: she would n't let him unlace her boots that night.

"I just wish," said she, "you would mind your own affairs. What business of yours was it, if Miss Leslie married Mr. Cavello?"

"It wa'n't my business ef
Miss Leslie hed married
Massa Cavello;
but



't was my
business ef
Massa Cavello
hed married Miss
Leslie," said Pomp,
stoutly. "Dis ain't
no way, — to hev her driv' into gittin' married.
Yer done suited yerself, Miss Marie, ef yer
did n't please ole Massa."

"O Pomp! I should think you would be ashamed to speak so to your poor, sick mistress. The Colonel is away amusing himself, and I am left in poverty, with these boys and a niece all on my hands." And Mrs. St. John

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

put on an injured air, and wiped her eyes, and sighed.

"Oh, come, come!" said Pomp, cheerfully: "dis is n't no way to go on. Yer's got free beaucherful boys, an' Miss Leslie; an' yer's young an' harnsome, an' de Colonel tink dere ain't nobody else in de world only you. Don't tink no more 'bout Mr. Cavello. He wa'n't de one for Miss Leslie. I'se set Massa Tom off for her."

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. St. John, despondently. "You can set him off, to the end of time; but I don't believe he wants to marry her."

"I know he does," said Pomp, confidently.

"How do you know?" inquired Mrs. St. John.

"I know by de way he looks at her an' acts wid her."

"How does he look and act with her, Pomp?"

"Wall, he looks at her kind o' steddly-like, an' den he looks at oder folks like as ef he'd say, 'Who yer, roun' here, makin' b'lieve yer 'r harnsome, 'cause yer got eyes an' nose an' mouf? Nobody ain't wuth lookin' at 'cept jes Miss Leslie.' An' when she says suthin', ef 't ain't no more dan, 'Whar's my par'sol?' or 'Pass me de butter,' he looks mighty pleased, 's ef she was de fust 'oman dat ever spoke a word, an'

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

he looks roun' to see ef ev'body ain't list'nin' an' a'mirin' of her. Oh, yer see if Massa Tom ain't down here putty soon after her!"

After a time, Mrs. St. John allowed herself to be comforted, and went to sleep, feeling that she had done all that could be expected of her towards righting the wrongs of life.

Leslie had such a headache that she did not get up to breakfast.

Mrs. St. John had determined to put the best face on affairs; and so she dressed herself carefully, and with a cheerful smile went down to the dining-room.

She was not going to have these Yankees think that Leslie had been jilted; but she had not decided whether to say that Leslie had run off with Mr. Cavello and been dragged back by Pomp, or that Mr. Cavello had carried her off against her will, and Pomp had rescued her; whether to represent her as forsaking the love of a splendid young fellow without money for a world-worn man who had unlimited wealth, or to give her the character of a young and inexperienced girl, who had thrown away a wonderful chance for the romance of love and poverty.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Before she had fairly made up her mind what to say, Mrs. Stevens, whose delicacy never overbalanced her curiosity, drew her chair up close to Mrs. St. John, and asked how Miss Leslie was, and said that they were all so fond of her that they hoped nothing unpleasant had occurred.

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. St. John. "It was only that old fool of a Pomp, who made a great fuss out of nothing." Then she went on to explain, with a fine, easy flow of improvisation, that Mr. Cavello, having heard of Mr. Douglas's visit, had become very jealous. So, after inviting Leslie to drive, he had gone on until he reached the city, and had tried to induce her to be married that day, so as to secure her. But Leslie, of course, like all girls, wanted a trousseau and a grand wedding, and had not fairly made up her mind what to do, when Pomp stumbled upon the party, and urged Leslie to come home, and made a sad picture of how her aunt would feel, and what her uncle would say, until he finally persuaded her to come back with him; and of course Mr. Cavello was very angry, and told Leslie to choose, once for all.

"If she is going to marry him at all, I'm sure

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

I wish she had done so yesterday,—if they wanted to be romantic. It would have saved me a world of trouble. We shall have another scene in a day or two, when Mr. Cavello gets over his pique. I hope he and Mr. Douglas won't meet in the mean time.

“Poor old Pomp thinks every one in the family belongs to him; and he meddles and interferes, till I often wish he had run off with the others; but he can't be sent off, of course.”

Leslie became quite a sensation. The young ladies looked at her with admiration. How elegant to be run away with, like a girl in a novel!

“I always supposed,” remarked Miss Merriam, “that when people ran away they had post-horses and a postilion in bottle-green livery, with pistols, and that the young lady's head was forever out of the window to see if her papa was after them, and that a big brother was invariably in hot pursuit. I never dreamed that one could be so romantic with a stable-horse and a buggy, and one old black man.”

The next two days passed, without a word from Mr. Cavello. Mrs. St. John was vexed.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

It looked as if he was going to drop the affair.

The third day brought a letter from the Colonel. Mrs. St. John read it on the piazza, and, looking at Leslie, said, —

“I'll see you, for a moment, in my room. Here is something about you, my young lady.”

Of course they all thought Mr. Cavello was trying to make up with the injured aunt.

“Well,” said Mrs. St. John, rejoining the group of ladies on the piazza, “do pity me. Leslie is so changeable that I can't do any thing. I never saw anybody so *set*, as they say here. I sha'n't say a word more. They may settle it for themselves.”



X

“**A** WET spell” had come, as Uncle Peter said. It rained, day after day.

Mrs. St. John was indignant.

This was pretty weather for the sea-shore! She had no thick dresses; and so she stayed in bed, with the Colonel’s opera cloak about her.

Leslie had enough to do to amuse the boys. She kept them in the bowling-alley as much as she could.

One day a letter came from the Colonel. He had some fine project in hand, and wanted them all to come to him.

Mrs. St. John sent for the landlord, and reprimanded him severely for bringing her there under false pretences.

“It’s just like the middle of winter. You live here every year, and of course you knew about it. I should n’t feel legally obliged to pay

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

you a cent for the time I have been here, for I came for the warm sun and for pleasant sea air; but make out your bill, and I'll pay it at once. I must go back to town to-day, or I shall be dead to-morrow."

So Pomp and Leslie packed the trunks. Poor Leslie! Her "next time" was never to be here by the beautiful sea, nor on these lovely country roads.

They were ready for the noon train. The landlord was very rude. He said that they had engaged for the summer, and were bound to pay for it; but Mrs. St. John said, "Yes, for summer, not for winter." She expected that he would have sleighing before long, if he kept on at this rate.

The poor man almost thought himself the clerk of the weather, before she left.

Pomp had gone in an earlier train, to open the house; and Leslie, who was the guide, mistook the time, and they had to wait an hour at the station.

Leslie never forgot that hour. She almost thought, from her aunt's severe remarks, that she had made it, and tacked it on to the usual twenty-four.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

At last, at dark, in a pouring rain, they reached the house.

Pomp had made a fire in the furnace. Mrs. St. John's spirits rose as she grew warm.

"We may as well go to the Colonel at once," she said. "We could start to-morrow, if it was n't for our things here. What shall we do with them? We shall have to auction them off, I think. I'm sure we have paid this landlord enough, without giving him the things we have bought ourselves. But I am afraid it will be a heap of trouble to have an auction."

"Oh, no, it won't," said Pomp. "It is n't never no trouble to sell tings: it's trouble to buy 'em. Why, ef yer buy, yer has to go out, an' yer has to spend yer money; but, in sellin', yer jes stays in de house, an' gits money fur tings yer does n't want an' can't kerry off wid yer, nohow."

"But every thing is a trouble," returned Mrs. St. John. "If it was n't for the heat it would make in the house, I'd burn all our things up, to save the trouble of selling them."

"Yer could n't burn de piano up," said Pomp. "Yer could n't git it into de furnace."

"What an old fool you are!" said Mrs. St.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

John. "Let us look over the things, Leslie, and make a list. Here's the piano, and that red velvet chair, and those vases, and" —

"And the towel-rack, and the foot-rest, and the slipper-case I bought at the church fair," added Leslie.

"Yes; and the gilt shaving-stand the Colonel bought, the last time he came on.

"I suppose," she added, turning to Pomp, "that there are heaps of broken things."

"Yes, missus; but all on 'em ain't oun. We've broke a good many of de lan'lord's. We ain't no right to sell dem, hev we?"

"We'll put all our broken things into barrels, and get rid of them in that way," said Mrs. St. John.

"De barrels is all done broke dereselfs," replied Pomp.

"Well, trunks, then," said Mrs. St. John. "Don't pick me up so, Pomp!"

"De trunks! Massy gracious!" cried Pomp. "Yer does n't want to sell yer trunks, full o' broken traps, and kerry yer clo'es Souf in yer han's, does yer?"

"We shall have some on us," said Mrs. St. John, with dignity. "Very few people travel

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

without clothes in this country, if they do in yours.

"But if you won't use trunks," she added, "tie the things up in sheets."

"De sheets ain't ourn: dey b'longs to de house. Dey would n't hold much, any way. De boys hes used 'em so much fur tents, an' hes wrastled so in bed, an' fired de pillers roun' so free, dat de cases is — well, yer kin git in mos' anywhar, an' out mos' anywhar too; an' de fedders flies out o' dem pillers like as ef yer was shakin' a chicken. Ef I was yer, Miss Marie, I'd leave dem broke tings fur de lan'lord to cl'ar up."

"So I will. Horrid old thing! It would serve him just right," said Mrs. St. John.

"Now look at that ceiling, Leslie," she added: "did you ever see any thing like it?"

"The boys did that," said Leslie.

"Well," said Mrs. St. John, "they learned to make them here. I'm sure I never heard of a 'spit-ball' until I came North. What a house this was to let to a gentleman's family! We have paid rent enough for it. Just look at that spot on the sofa. Ugh! it is sticky."

"I reckon that was some of our medicine,

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

that we've had round. That is n't any thing," said Clarence.

"And those lace curtains! What a color! The landlord will do those up before he lets the house again, if he has any kind of decency, — which I should n't judge he had," said Mrs. St. John.

"They were fresh when we came," said Leslie.

"Of course they were: he could n't expect to let a house with soiled curtains, could he?"

"I reckon de piano 'll fotch a heap," said Pomp, who had been attentively listening to the conversation. "We ought to 'tend to de auction tings now."

"You must rub up the piano, Pomp," said Leslie. "You know Clarence and Wilfrid used to spring on it dreadfully, when they ran round the parlor over all the furniture."

"I wonder you would allow them to act so, Leslie," said Mrs. St. John. "I should no more think of jumping on a piano than on a looking-glass."

"I danced a clog-dance on it one night," said Clarence; "and we put paper inside of it, and Arthur thumped on the keys like a banjo. Oh, it was awful funny music!"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Pomp examined the piano critically.

"Some parts shows de boot-heels, but it ain't so bad as it mought be," said he, — it took a great deal to surprise Pomp, — "I thinks a little grease would put it in putty good shape."

"All the keys don't go," said Clarence. "There's a pin in one. I can see it."

"You can shut it down, for the auction," said his mother. "Oh, no, you can't, either. I'll wager a good bit they'll want to hear the tone: it would be just like these Yankees. That chair is all right, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Leslie. "The springs are good, — only, aunty, I think there are moths in it."

"Very likely. It was bought North," said Mrs. St. John. "I would n't trust a Northerner while I turned my head round. It was bought with moths in it, if they are there. We can't sell a chair better than we buy it, of course."

"You can pin a tidy over that stained place on the back, Leslie, and it can go with the chair."

"We must put a high price on every thing," she continued, "because I've always heard that people insist on beating down, at auctions."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Who's going to say, 'Going, going, gone'?" asked Clarence.

"I s'pose I is," said Pomp. "I does 'mos' ev'ry ting."

"No," said Mrs. St. John, "I shall send for a man who makes a business of it. If I am going to have an auction, I'll have one."

Pomp went at once to the grocer, who directed him to an auctioneer.

The man came to look over the house, and was surprised to see how little was to be sold; but that was none of his business. He said he would set the day, and then advertise it a few times.

"Advertise it!" exclaimed Mrs. St. John. "What in the world would you advertise it for? You don't suppose people are coming here from the four corners of the earth, to buy a few old things, do you? Besides, I am going away day after to-morrow. I'll have the auction to-morrow. You've got a flag, haven't you? I never heard of an auctioneer who had not.

"But be sure," she called after him, "not to put up a small-pox flag, and make the people afraid to come in."

When the flag was flung to the breeze, Mrs.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

St. John seated herself at a front window, to inspect the people who came up the steps.

When any one appeared whose looks did not please her, she called to Pomp not to let him in, or to tell him it was n't time, and that he would better come back day after to-morrow; adding, in a low tone, "when we shall be all cleared up and gone."

Before the auction began, Mrs. St. John and Leslie seated themselves in the back parlor, where they could see what was going on, through a crack between the sliding-doors.

Pomp stayed in the front parlor, where the auction was to take place, to keep an eye on things, and see that the auctioneer did his duty.

Several of the neighbors, to whom the St. Johns had afforded a great deal of excitement, and who knew that the house had been let furnished, came in to look on.

About thirty people had assembled in the hall and parlor at the appointed hour.

"Pomp! Pomp!" called Mrs. St. John. Pomp went to the crack, and looked in with one eye.

"I don't like the looks of those men over there," said the lady, in a loud whisper, loud enough to be heard by those standing near.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"You must keep a sharp eye on them. They look like Jews. We ought to have had a policeman here, to watch."

The people looked at each other, and felt like pickpockets.

The auctioneer's voice broke the silence.

"The first thing offered for sale in this elegant house is a superb piano, for which seven hundred and fifty dollars was paid, six short months ago."

"What a whopper!" said Clarence. "It only cost three hundred, — the legs were so scratched up."

"The lady assures me that seven hundred and fifty dollars was its price," said the man, looking threateningly at the impudent boy who was trying to ruin his sale.

Leslie glanced inquiringly at her aunt.

"The man said it was marked at that price, and was worth it, — only he let me have it cheap," said Mrs. St. John, in answer to her look.

"Clarence!" she called. "Come into this room, this moment."

Every one turned toward the back parlor.

"The tone is equal to that of a Steinway,"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

continued the auctioneer. "I might play 'Green-ville' myself, but I suppose some one here can display it to better advantage."

No one stirred; and so he ran his fingers over the keys, and soon knocked off the instrument for one hundred and fifty dollars, — "Which was enough for the old thing," Mrs. St. John said.

"Well, here is a clock. Who will bid on this? It is an elegant French clock, — runs a week."

"It runs two, if you run with it," said Wilfrid: and he and Arthur laughed.

"Did we buy that, or does it belong to the house?" whispered Mrs. St. John to Leslie.

"To the house, I think," she replied. "I was n't here at the first, you know."

"I'll give you five dollars," said a man.

"Five-fifty," said another.

"Six dollars."

Mrs. St. John beckoned to Pomp.

"Nobody can't buy dat," Pomp called out, in a loud voice, "'cause it does n't b'long to us. We forgot. Dat's de lan'lord's clock."

Every one laughed.

"Well, here," said the man, "is a towel-rack, not owned by the landlord, and worked by fair fingers, doubtless. Some young bachelor would

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

find this priceless. Five dollars it is marked. It is a bunch of white lilies worked on a background of — of — blue.”

“Gas-light green,” said a young lady near him.

“On a background of gas-light green,” he repeated. “It is useful as well as ornamental, and worth double its price.”

“I only paid three for it,” whispered Leslie.

“I knew they would beat him down, and so I marked it five,” replied her aunt, with a business-like air.

“One dollar,” called a voice from the hall.

“What a mean man!” said Mrs. St. John, in a loud whisper, which was heard in the front parlor.

“One dollar twenty-five, — one-fifty, — two dollars.”

“Gone, — at two dollars!”

“Stingy enough, I am sure,” said Mrs. St. John, half-aloud.

“This red velvet chair is in good condition. Springs in order. Tidy goes with it, and gives it a feminine and homelike air. As the poet asks, —

‘What’s a chair without a tidy?’”

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"It's a chair," giggled Wilfrid's voice from behind the door.

The people looked at each other, and laughed. They had never attended such a sale before. The auctioneer was amused, too: it seemed like playing at auction.

At length, after various bids, the chair was sold.

A vase was just being carried off, when Mrs. St. John remembered that that was n't hers.

"The pink pair are mine, — on the mantel-piece," she called, through the crack.

The woman who had bought the large vase was very angry.

"Why do you have an auction," she asked, "if you have n't any thing to sell?"

"We have," replied Mrs. St. John, through the crack.

"Why don't you sell it, then, and know your own mind?"

"Why don't you buy the things we own, and not the things which belong to the landlord?" replied again the invisible proprietress.

"These pink vases," said the auctioneer, pointing to the mantel-piece, "are very rare, I am told. The pictures on them are gems of

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

art, — shepherd and shepherdess, surrounded by flock, — landscape in the distance. I have never seen a pair like them before. I should judge they were *Sèvres* or Dresden china, only that the mark of seven dollars shows that they must be of less value. But perhaps their value was not known. At any rate, they are very beautiful, and evidently a great bargain, such as one meets with only once in a lifetime."

"I did n't know they were so valuable," said Mrs. St. John, in a low tone, to Leslie. "I bought them at a ninety-nine-cent store; but, if they are such a bargain, I'll just keep them myself."

The people were beginning to bid, when Mrs. St. John called out, —

"You need not sell those vases. I think I'll keep them myself."

A laugh went around the room.

"The slipper-case and foot-rest, — will you keep those too, Madame?" asked the auctioneer, turning toward the crack.

"You can sell them, if you get their value: otherwise, I will keep them myself," called out the voice. "I want ten dollars for the foot-rest, and seven for the slipper-case."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Nobody bid, and the auctioneer laid them aside.

Pomp came forth from the back parlor.

"Missus says she don't know as she keers for de slipper-case, after all, an' she 'll let it go for free dollars, ef somebody 'll buy de foot-rest for four."

Several spoke at once. A laugh was raised, and the articles were knocked down.

"Is this satin furniture for sale?" asked some one in the hall.

"No."

"These draperies and mirrors?"

"No, sir."

"Any thing in the other parts of the house?"

"No, Madame."

"What *is* for sale?"

"Here is a trunk, for one thing, — locked, — key can't be found, — sold on speculation."

"Two dollars," said a second-hand-clothes man, who looked like a second-hand man.

"Two seventy-five," said his neighbor.

"Massy gracious!" cried Pomp, "don't bid no more! I done forgot till dis blessed minute dat dat ar trunk was Massa Cavello's. I 'spect dar ain't much in it, or he'd ha' sent fur it.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Any how, dat ain't ourn, an' we ain't got no right to sell it. I'll fin' out whar his club is, an' sen' it to him, though he don't deserve to git it."

"This gilt shaving-stand," resumed the auctioneer, after Pomp's episode, as he moved aside the trunk, "will go at a good bargain. In the morning, when the light is perhaps rather dim, or at eve, when the bureau-glass does not catch a good light, this small stand can be easily moved about, and afford comfort to the man who would otherwise appear to his friends with black court-plaster covering ghastly wounds, made not by 'the envious Casca,' but by his own hand."

A slight young man, who had the air of a piano-tuner, and who had bid off the piano, attracted the eye of the auctioneer. He had light hair, smooth cheeks, and a thin mustache.

"Here, young man, it would serve your purpose well! Shall I look to you for a bid?"

"You'd better help him get more hair: he can't raise what he wants now," cried Wilfrid, from behind the hall-door.

The young man wanted to kill him.

At last, the shaving-stand was disposed of.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Here is a boy's jacket, with a jack-knife in the pocket, and a few marbles."

The auctioneer could not help laughing: it seemed so absurd to sell one old jacket, in this elegant house.

At the words "jack-knife" and "marbles," Clarence rushed into the parlor, and when he beheld the jacket he burst into a flood of tears.

"Give me that jacket, you old fool!" said he. "Those are the things I gave Jasper when he was sick, and he's dead now. I tell you, give it to me. It's his jacket!"

"Oh, yes," said Pomp, the tears running down his cheeks: "dat don't go. I dunno whar dat ar' jacket come from now. Dat war what my poor little gran'son hed on to him when he died, a-lyin' on dat very red satin soffy. No, no: we can't sell little dead boys' clo'es! Miss Marie ain't so pore as dat yit."

Two ladies got up hastily from the sofa: one of them had to stop to pull away her sash-fringes which adhered to the cover.

The auctioneer handed the jacket to Pomp, hardly knowing whether to swear or laugh.

"Well," said he, "we will try once more, hoping that the party to whom this belongs is in

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

fine health and spirits, and willing to part with his clothes."

"Here is a fine cloak, — a military cloak, I should say. It is of fine" —

"Oh! Nobody must n't make no bid on dat," called Pomp, in a loud voice. "Dat can't be sold, nohow: dat b'longs to de Colonel, an' wa'n't never meant to be sold. Massy gracious! Why, don't you know! Dat 's de Colonel's op'ra cloak, — Colonel St. John's."

"No, don't sell that!" cried Mrs. St. John, through the crack. "Of course that can't be sold: anybody might have known that. We are not second-hand-clothes men."

"What did you put it here for, if it was n't to be sold?" asked the auctioneer, in a little temper.

"I did n't put it dar," said Pomp. "It hed to be somewhar or 'noder, did n't it? I don't 'spect yer to sell yer own clo'es, jes' 'cause dey happens to be in dis house."

"I vould n't puy dat gloak, if dare vant notin' more to puy in de vorld," said the little Jew to his friend. "Dat gloak gum near to geddin' me inder drouble. I dought de devil vas in him dat night."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"But he vas a goot gloak," said his friend, regretfully, looking after it. "And de leedle goat, — das vas a goot leedle goat. I likes to puy gloes mit bockets in 'em. I finds dings in de bockets, somedimes."

The little Jew looked admiringly at his friend: he had learned a new point in business.

"Well, is there any thing else to be sold?" asked the auctioneer.

"No," said Pomp. "Yer hev sold all dere is and more 'n dere is."

"And now I hope you are satisfied," said Mrs. St. John, in a low voice. "That man is a monomaniac, Leslie. He wants to sell every thing he can lay his hands on."

The people were soon gone, and Mrs. St. John proceeded to settle with the auctioneer.

"How much do you ask for selling these things? Not much, of course, for they were my own things."

"Well, five dollars will satisfy me," said the man.

"I should think it might! You had n't rent to pay, or any thing that other people have to spend money for. Yours must be a very paying business," she said.

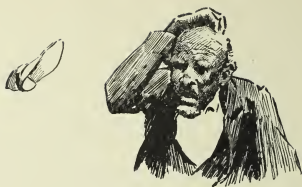
The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Sinking into an easy-chair, after the auctioneer was gone, she cried: "I declare, I am almost tired to death. I was never so sick of anybody in my life as I was of that auctioneer. I thought he never would get off till he had sold every one of us; and you 'd think, to hear him go on about things, that he owned them all. I pity his wife, if his tongue runs that way all the time."

"It makes yer feel kind o' solemn too, does n't it," said Pomp, "to see tings go out o' de house yer 's used to seein' in it, — kind o' like a funereal. I wanted to grab dem men by de ha'r, when dey kerried off our pianner."

"It would have been a pretty sight," said Mrs. St. John, "to have had the police in. Dear, dear, dear! How can the Colonel leave all this care on me?"

"Pomp," she added, "you count out the rent, and put it into an envelope, and send it to the landlord the morning we go away; for, if he knows we are going, he'll be looking about and asking impertinent questions. When he does get here, he'll find his house all ready to move right into; and we shall be out of his way, and give him no trouble whatever."



XI

THE day after their arrival in town, Leslie had sent Arthur to the Doctor's. She longed to find out, if possible, whether Mr. Cavello had told the truth about Tom. She could not believe it, when she remembered his manner towards her, and the tones of his voice. She was so sincere herself that it was hard for her to believe that others were not so. Arthur had returned with the melancholy news that the family had all gone to the mountains.

How crookedly things do go sometimes! Oh, how could she go away without thanking Mrs. Douglas for her kindness, and Bessie, and the Doctor, and Tom! How could she go, and never say "Good-by" to him!

Poor little Leslie! There had been dull days and tiresome days, and the tears had found their

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

way often and easily to her eyes; but there had never been a cut like this! She cried herself to sleep that night.

She sent Pomp to the Doctor's to ask when the family would return. The Doctor was at home, and said he thought they would be back in a week.

A week! A year would be no worse. She could not tell them where she was going, for her uncle had only designated a railway junction, where he was to meet them; and she did not know how to leave any address, nor did her aunt.

Mrs. St. John had lost her interest in Tom, since he had failed to do his duty while at the sea-shore.

"I'm sure he was near enough to it. Anybody with half an eye could see that! Why did n't you bring him to the point?" she asked.

"I could n't do such a thing," said Leslie, with the tears in her eyes. "I don't know how." And she added, with spirit: "I would n't if I could. If he cared any thing for me, he could have told me: if he did n't, I would n't have had him say so, if I could have made him!"

"All very fine," said Mrs. St. John, — "very

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

fine, indeed! — especially in a poor girl fed and clothed by her relations, who are starving themselves to do it, — taking the very bread out of their mouths, as it were.

“You never mean to marry, I suppose. You sent Mr. Cavello away, you little goose!”

“And would you really like me to marry Mr. Cavello,” said Leslie: “a man nobody knows any thing about, and whom I hate? Oh, why did you never have me learn to do something, so that I could sew, or sweep, or teach school, to earn my own living? I would a thousand, thousand times rather do any thing, than to stay here, when you don't want me!”

Leslie did not wait until night to cry, this time.

Pomp was quite in despair at the unfortunate turn affairs were taking.

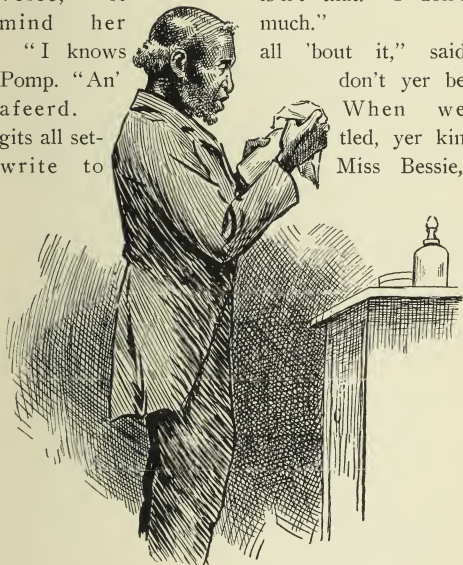
“Now, chile,” said he, patting her pretty head, which was buried in her pillow, “don't yer min' what Miss Marie says. She don' mean nothin'. She's kind o' cross dis mornin'. She frowed her shoe at me dis vary day. She did n't hurt me none, but I hollered, an' put my harnd up to my eye; an' den she was skeert, an' said she did n't mean to; an' I keeps it kind o' shet

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

up, when I goes into her room, so 's to keep her skeert."

"O Pomp," said Leslie, with a smothered voice, "it is n't that. I don't mind her much."

"I knows all 'bout it," said Pomp. "An' don't yer be afeerd. When we gits all settled, yer kin write to Miss Bessie,



an' tell her whar yer is, an' yer 'll hear putty soon."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"Oh, I shall never see them again," said Leslie, — "never again. And I can't thank them for being so kind to me. They've been kinder than anybody but you, Pomp. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I shall never see them again!"

Pomp brought some cologne, and bathed her aching head, saying, —

"Dar, now! dar, now! Don't yer cry no mo'. Yer jes' go to sleep, an' who kin tell what'll happen when yer wakes up?"

Nothing pleasant happened, however. Thursday came, and the house was closed.

It was several weeks before the family were settled. They boarded in one country place and in another; they went away from one city: they went to another.

Finally, Mrs. St. John took to her bed, — it was her weapon of defence, — and announced that she should not move from that town until fall: she'd been whisked about enough.

That day, thinking that they seemed to be settled for a fortnight, at least, poor Leslie wrote a letter to Bessie. She looked out every single word in the dictionary, even the *thes* and the *ofs*.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"We are staying at——," wrote Leslie, "and shall be here for two weeks. After that, uncle will take us to the country. He has some business there which is very important, and which he wants to look after himself.

"I wish you would answer me before we go there. I want to hear from you. I was so sorry not to bid you good-by and thank you for all your kindness. I shall never forget it. Give my love to your mother, and my kind regards to all the rest of your family."

How she wanted to ask where Tom was: what he was doing, saying, thinking; how he was looking; if he was well; if he remembered her.

"Oh!" sighed she, "if the things I've *thought* on to this paper could be read, what in the world would they think of me?"

Leslie gave the letter to her uncle to post. And there in his deep pocket it rested for many a day, while the girl watched and hoped and longed for an answer. Every step by the door, every knock, made her heart beat.

The two weeks went by, and no letter came. She had thought just for a second, time and time again, that Tom really liked her. But now she saw he had only meant to be kind and pleasant.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Oh, how she wished he had been cold and distant and cross, and had never made her think — although he had never tried to make her think — that he was fond of her. That she was sure of. No, he never would do so cruel a thing as that. Of course, anybody would like Miss Henderson best. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

Then Leslie made up her mind that she would never think of Tom again, never once. Only, when she said her simple prayer at night, she would ask God to make him happy always, even if she must be unhappy.

The Doctor, whose head had little room for the St. Johns and their affairs, forgot to speak of their departure until Tom, on his return, said that he had half a mind to run down to the sea-shore, to call on the opera cloak.

“Let me see,” said the Doctor. “Pomp came here one day to say they were all going away, somewhere. I forget where, if he told me. I don’t know whether they all went or not.”

Tom walked to Margrave Street before going to his office. The house was empty; the furniture was gone; paperer and painter were hard

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

at work. Leslie had vanished, as utterly as if she were dead.

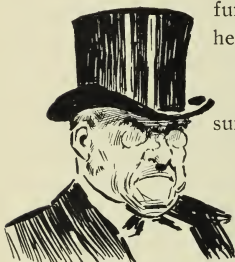
Tom wrote to the Elden House, to learn the St. Johns' address. The landlord did not know where they had gone.

Tom wondered why Leslie did not write. She could write to Bessie, surely; and she must know that he could not guess what part of the earth she had flown to, unless she told him.

He was hurt through and through. Perhaps Mrs. St. John had whisked the girl off, to marry her to some old sinner with plenty of money. And he had meant to have a square talk with her, the next time he went down, in spite of everybody and every thing. He would have done so that time, except for the opera cloak. He had never dreamed that the whole family could fly off, like a flock of birds, without warning. He had no need to wait until business came in to marry, thank fortune, if Leslie had wanted him. And he felt almost sure she did. He had a snug little property which his grandmother had left him. Well, what good was it now? He did not know where on earth to look for the girl.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

He went to see the landlord of the city house. He did not know where they had gone: he only wished he did. His elegant furniture was all ruined: he believed they kept a riding-school there. He took Tom for a fellow-sufferer.



So the summer passed away, and the pleasant days of September and October.

The Doctor's family had nearly lost their interest in the St. Johns. Once in a while Pomp or his mistress was quoted, or the opera cloak was referred to.

One evening Tom went to Mrs. Ackerman's, and told her about the matter.

"Don't despair," said she, looking at her husband, who was working away at the other end of the room. "Every thing will come right, if you care enough about her to wait and look, and not fall in love with some other pretty girl. John and I had a long hard time, but we feel

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

surer of each other than many who slip easily into love and marriage."

"I have done all I can," said Tom, "and that's very little. I think she didn't care a cent for me, or she would have written to my sister."

"Oh, a thousand things may have happened. A letter may have been lost, — just think how many are lost, to keep up that great place at Washington! — and she may be waiting to hear from you."

"I have thought," said Tom, "that perhaps her aunt has married her off, and so hustled her out of my way; for I think she would have come to like me, if she had stayed here, and no other fellow had been in the way."

"Come to like you!" said Mrs. Ackerman, laughing. "Why, my dear boy, it was as plain as daylight that she had no eyes but for you. I never saw a face speak more plainly. She was a dear little girl, sweet and sincere. And yet she had a look about her pretty mouth which makes me think that Aunt St. John could not marry her off against her will."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Tom. "I'll run on to the place where I last heard of the

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

Colonel. Perhaps I can track him at one of the hotels: although I should n't be surprised if the family were living in Egypt, or had settled at the South pole. They seem to own the magic carpet, and travel at will."

"I would go," said Mrs. Ackerman; "and, perhaps when you see your little lady-love, you'll find that the golden halo has disappeared, and you'll wonder why you ever took a fancy to her. And you'll at least get cured, if you don't come home engaged."

"Get cured!" said Tom. "Thunder, I don't want to get cured! I don't believe you know what it's like."

"Do I not?" said Mrs. Ackerman, smiling, and raising her eyebrows. She liked Tom for his pet. She liked to see him earnest and determined.

"She has never lived among people," said Tom, fearful lest the conversation should turn from Leslie: "she has never lived among people who knew any thing. But I lent her some books, and she got hold of the good points at once. She wants to learn every thing."

"The child has been neglected, that is very evident," said Mrs. Ackerman; "but your mother

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

and Bessie would soon set her in order, and I'll take her under my wing, if she'll be taken. We are going abroad next year. What a very nice thing it would be, if you would join us! It would be the best thing in the world for your little girl."

"Go on," said Tom. "Say more, tell me I'm engaged to her, tell me I'm married to her, tell me I'm abroad. I will believe it all, — you have such a way of putting things. Come, bring Leslie out, — I know she's behind your screen."

"I wish she were," said Mrs. Ackerman, laughing. "Stay to tea, Tom, and then go home early. Start on your trip to-morrow, and write me when you find your bonnie Leslie."

Mrs. Douglas was very suspicious and very anxious when Tom said he was going to take a little trip; but she did not say a word, for fear of putting something into his head which might not be there. It was true, as Tom said: he needed a change. He had been very cross lately: his mother said he had been nervous.

Tom felt as if he had been hardly used. His friends, when they were in his place, had smooth enough sailing. They knew the street and number where the sweetheart lived; and the very

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

name was on the door; and there was a bell that would ring, and a person to answer it; and there was a parlor, and the young lady was in it.

Alas! his little girl was on Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand, for all he knew. All the bells in creation would not bring her in sight.

Bessie packed Tom's clothes, and told him, if he met the opera cloak, to commend her to it.

In a search after truth, or any thing else, it is a comfort to have a definite point to aim at. Tom had one.

He went to all the hotels. The St. Johns had been at them all, at one time or another. He went to the clubs. The Colonel had always "just gone out." It seemed as if he was trying to elude Tom, for he was evidently in the city.

I think myself that the waiters and servants were in league with the free, genial, fee-bestowing Colonel, and thought to rescue him from this leech-like creditor; and part of the time the Colonel really was out of town.

Tom had been looking about for a week. One day he was straggling along the street, very much discouraged, when he came upon a group of gentlemen. They were listening to one of

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

the number, — a tall, stout man, with a slouched hat, — who was speaking very earnestly and gesticulating with fervor.



Tom's eye was caught. What was that he saw before him! A blue cape, lined with red, flapping in the breeze. There were gilt clasps at the neck. Tom was about to embrace it and water it with his tears, when it occurred to him there might be other blue cloaks in the world. But he boldly approached the wearer.

"Is this Colonel St. John?"

The gentleman turned and eyed him.

"I am Colonel St. John, sir!"

"My name is Douglas," said Tom. "I've

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

been trying to hunt you up for a week, to find where your family are now. They lived near us last winter, and I thought I would call, if they were in town."

"Douglas! Douglas!" Where had the Colonel heard the name? The young man was well dressed, and a gentleman, — that was evident. Perhaps he would buy lead-stock.

The Colonel shook hands with Tom.

"My family are in town," he said, "for a little time. We are for a few days at the Lagrange House. They'll be glad to see you. Dine with us to-night at six."

Tom did not ask after Leslie. He could not trust his voice.

He bade the Colonel good-by. He wanted to give him his purse; he wanted to kiss him; he thought him a ministering angel.

He hurried to the hotel, and met Leslie face to face at the parlor door.

The moment they met, Tom knew it was all right; and Leslie knew it, too.

"I am staying in the city for a few days," said Tom; "and I came across the Colonel, and found where you were.

"Well," he went on, looking at her with his

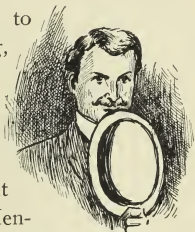
The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"smiling eyes," as Leslie called them, "I guess I won't lie! I came here to hunt you up, and now I've found you. Are you a bit glad to see me?"

"Yes, if you want me to be," said Leslie, half-crying, half-laughing.

"Is there no other fellow?" asked Tom.

"No," said Leslie, shaking her head: "nobody but Pomp. Where is Miss Henderson?"



"I don't know, and I don't care, — do you?"

"No," said Leslie, "if you don't."

"Come back with me and see her," said Tom. "Will you, Leslie?"

"I'll tell Aunt Marie you are here." And the girl rushed up to her own room, and threw herself on her bed, and hid her face in the pillow.

"He's come! he's come!" she whispered.

She saw that her eyes were shining, as she smoothed her hair, and that her cheeks were flushed. She was glad she was pretty.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

She went into her aunt's room.

"Aunt Marie, Mr. Douglas has come."

"The Doctor?" asked Mrs. St. John, starting up, "or his son?"

"His son."

"Have you seen him? Has he offered himself to you?"

"Yes, — I don't know," said Leslie.

"Don't know?" said Mrs. St. John crossly. "I reckon you would know, if he had! What did he say?"

"He said he had come on purpose to hunt me up; and he asked me if I would go back with him to see Miss Henderson." Leslie was a little confused.

Mrs. St. John sank back upon the lounge.

"Did you say you would?"

"I didn't say any thing," said Leslie. "I ran away."

"I believe you are a natural fool," said her aunt. "Give me that dress on the chair. I'll be down in a minute."

Mrs. St. John was going to have no nonsense this time. But there was no need of her assistance. Tom came to meet her and took both her hands in his.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I am so glad to see you," he said. "Has Leslie told you I came to take her back with me, if she'd go? Do you think she will?"

The idea of taking her back had never entered his head, before the words said themselves.

Mrs. St. John's heart lightened. This was plain talking: there was no need of beating the bush.

"I don't know," she said, as if she had many minds on the subject. "A great many men have wanted Leslie. There was one rich Cuban, — oh, you know Mr. Cavello, — and there are a great many others. I've thought Leslie would make a great match."

"I have enough money," said Tom, "for two of us. Did you know I had a little fortune of my own? I wish it was a thousand times more, for Leslie's sake."

This was pleasant. Mrs. St. John thawed.

"Leslie likes you better than any of the others. She confessed it before we left that cold place where you live. So, money or no money, I must let her go, I suppose."

Tom wrote home that night that he had found the St. Johns, and was engaged to Leslie, and

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

that he would be married in a week, and bring her back. He was not going to let her slip away again. She was so good that he knew they would be delighted with her; and she could hardly wait to see his mother.

He wrote to Mrs. Ackerman:—

“‘I’ve chased the antelope over the plain,’—

that’s Leslie;

‘The tiger’s cub I’ve bound with a chain,’—

that’s her aunt;

‘And the young gazelle with his silvery feet
I’ll bind for thee for a playmate sweet,’—

that’s myself.

“I’m going to bring Leslie home with me, and make sure of her. I expect I shall have a strong-minded woman on my hands yet. She says she’s going to learn every thing.

“Thank you a thousand times for your kindness. Leslie sends her love.”

Pomp and the boys were delighted to see Tom. The boys borrowed his neckties and his handkerchiefs from his room, and wore them about with charming *abandon*.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"We've all got one on," said Clarence, touching his necktie, at dinner, and pointing to the other boys, as he nodded to Tom. Tom smiled back. Dear boys! How he loved them.

Mrs. St. John gave Leslie a hundred dollars, with which the Colonel had told her to "buy things." Very little could be done in a week toward a wedding trousseau; and Mrs. St. John was tired, and told Leslie she had better wait, and buy things when she got settled.

The Colonel gave her on the sly two hundred dollars more. It was very generous in him, for he had hard work to get along, just then. Tom told Leslie that she had better keep it, and send it back when she wrote to them: he had enough for all her "gewgaws."

The Colonel blessed Tom, when that letter arrived. He had not known, on a second thought, how to get along without the money.

"I found a song about you," said Leslie to Tom. "I bought it at a music-store. I will sing it for you some time. It is:—

"'Douglas, Douglas, tender and true;'

but it made me cry, it was so sad."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I don't think it is very sad to be 'tender and true,'" said Tom. "I fancy you'd cry by and by, if I was n't."

"I sha'n't be sad any more," said Leslie: "I'm perfectly happy; and you know I said that would pay me for all the unhappy days, — and it does."

"Do you remember that tea of ours, and how you warmed my toast, and how cozy it was there?" said Tom. "I wanted to kiss you, — but I knew you would be angry."

"I should have been angry," said Leslie, "but I should have liked it, — I mean if I'd thought, — no, I mean" —

"Oh, you need n't explain," said Tom. "It's all right now."

So they were married, — Leslie wearing the white dress which she had worn at the hop. Pomp had helped her sew, — for he was "quite a seamster." Mrs. St. John put on the flowers.

The boys all cried: they loved Leslie dearly. Mrs. St. John pressed to her dry eyes a fine handkerchief. Her mission was accomplished; peace reigned in her soul.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

The Colonel beamed with content: he was glad to have Leslie happy.

Pomp was heart-broken for himself, but joyful for his darling.

When Leslie bade them good-by, she kissed Pomp, and hugged him, and cried with all her heart.

"Don't yer cry," said Pomp, smiling a distorted smile through his tears. "Don't cry." Then he laid his hand on her head, and gave her his benediction: —

"May de Lord gib yer His massy-guard, an' make yer de light ob His eyes an' de joy ob His heart, an' bress yer fur ever an' ever. An' now go forth, an' take yer place 'mong de nations ob de 'arth, an' flourish like a green-baize tree. Amen."

"You used to give me awful cuts, Leslie," said Tom, when they were whirling away in the cars, "saying, 'just for once,' or 'just for twice.' Now, my young lady, I have you 'just for always.'"

"It is very strange that no letter comes from Tom," said Mrs. Douglas. "We have n't heard for a week."

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

One afternoon an expressman drove up to the Doctor's house. He brought in an unknown trunk and a big package, marked with their number.

"Tom will be here to tea," said Mrs. Douglas, cheerfully. "I was really getting worried, although I might have remembered how he hates writing letters."

"Where did he get that strange trunk, and what's in this package?" said little Ned, cutting the string.

There was a shout from all the family.

"What have we done?" cried Bessie, retreating, with an air of horror.

"What is it?" said the Doctor, raising his eyes.

It was the COLONEL'S OPERA CLOAK!

"The Opera Cloak! 'Not Lancelot, nor another,'" said Bessie, "but just him, himself. I suppose this trunk is his. Perhaps Tom is inside."

A telegram came a little later: "Home at seven."

The tea-table was set in the back parlor. The fire-light danced on the walls, and lighted up the silver and the pretty china. A dainty tea was made ready for Tom.



The Colonel's Opera Cloak

A ring at the door. It was his voice, dear fellow! How merry and happy he was!

But who was with him?

Leslie St. John!

"How lovely!" said Bessie, rushing to meet her. "What a surprise! Did your aunt come too, and all the boys?"

Leslie looked at Tom in dismay.

"Good gracious, mother!" cried Tom. "Bessie! Everybody! Did n't you get my letter? Did n't you know I was married?"

"Married! Who are you married to?" cried little Ned, quite elated. "Gertrude Henderson?"

"To Leslie, of course," said Tom. "Who else could it be?"

Mrs. Douglas sat down and cried. The Doctor looked over his glasses. A dead silence fell upon them. Leslie was still standing. Tom was getting angry. Bessie laughed, — Tom blessed her for that, — and ran to Leslie again, and kissed her.

"Come, Tom, you stupid," said she, "take off her things. She's cold."

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Douglas, "we never got your letter." And she went to him, and put her arms around his neck.

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"You know it now, mother," said he. "Don't you see Leslie?"

Poor Mrs. Douglas turned: Leslie's sweet face was wet with tears.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Douglas, do love me," she cried: "I'll do just what you tell me."

Then Tom's mother took the girl in her arms, — she had always had a tender place, down in her heart, somewhere, for Leslie, — and they kissed, and made friends.

The Doctor was pleased: he had always liked her.

"Come and sit in my chair, my dear," said he, trying to take off her bonnet, in his clumsy man's way; "you must not wonder, if we seem to be a little surprised."

Leslie threw her arms around him, and cried again.

So they all comforted her, and little Ned cried because the others did.

"You have an old friend here," said Bessie, shaking out the opera cloak as Leslie was lying on the sofa after tea, her hand in Mrs. Douglas's. "It came with the trunk."

"Why," cried Leslie, starting up, "where did that come from, Tom?"

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

"I don't know. Perhaps Pomp packed it up, thinking you'd be cold. I sent a package of yours and your trunk here to-day by express."

Then they had a great laugh; and Leslie was taken into the family joke of the opera cloak, and laughed with the rest.

"O. C. St. John, Esq., is quite a match-maker," said Bessie: "I wonder if he'll help me out."

The next morning a notice from the dead-letter office announced that a letter for Mrs. Douglas was held for postage. She sent for it, and so, rather late in the day, read the important announcement of Tom's marriage.

Leslie asked to have the letter, to keep.

The opera cloak was hung up in the lower hall. They were going to send it back to the Colonel.

One day it disappeared. It was never seen again.

Whether it was stolen, or whether it saw that its mission to the St. John family was accomplished, and went off on an errand of mercy in some other field of labor, never was known. But this we do know: somewhere, somehow, it yet

The Colonel's Opera Cloak

exists. And if you ever happen to meet a blue cloak, lined with red, with "brass knobs" at the neck, — no matter where it is or on whom it is, look on it with respect. You know its story. It is

THE COLONEL'S OPERA CLOAK.





LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY'S NEW AND POPULAR FICTION

A PRINCE OF SINNERS

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM, author of "The Traitors," etc. Illustrated by Oscar Wilson. 12mo. \$1.50.

A well-compacted and exceedingly interesting story of English political and social life, making no demands upon one's credulity, but satisfying the requirements in the way of a thoroughly good novel. The characters are all drawn with real fidelity to life. — HARRY THURSTON PECK, Editor of *The Bookman*.

Lord Arranmore is a character that would have thrown no discredit upon a Thackeray or a George Eliot, and more than once we are reminded of Goethe's Mephistopheles. Mr. Oppenheim has written an ingenious, edifying, and extremely interesting story. It is the best he has yet produced. — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

Unquestionably one of the very best volumes of fiction of the year. — B. O. FLOWER, Editor of *The Arena*.

THE SIEGE OF YOUTH

By FRANCES CHARLES, author of "In the Country God Forgot." Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

In Miss Frances Charles, now that a second novel from her hand permits comparison, America has found a writer still in the flush of youth, with marked powers of discrimination and characterization and a downright genius for analysis. — *Dial*, Chicago.

She is an artist all through in mind and manner, and her depicting of artistic and literary Bohemia is as graphic a bit of work as is often done in that line. She knows her types and the ways of them, and she handles them like a master. — *Philadelphia Telegraph*.

THE SPOILS OF EMPIRE

A Romance of the Old World and the New. By FRANCIS NEWTON THORPE. Illustrated by Frank B. Masters. 12mo. \$1.50.

A notable piece of fiction. . . . Scenes in Spain and Mexico are presented before our eyes with wonderful vividness, and it would be difficult to find a more graphic piece of descriptive writing than that provided in the picture of the retreat of Cortez' booty-laden soldiers from the Aztec capital. — *Louisville Times*.

NEW AND POPULAR FICTION

THE GOLDEN WINDOWS

A Book of Fables for Old and Young. By LAURA E. RICHARDS, author of "Captain January," "The Joyous Story of Toto," etc. With illustrations and decorations by Arthur E. Becher and Julia Ward Richards. 12mo. \$1.50.

This charming book will be a source of delight to those who love the best literature. The stories are so simple and graceful that they suggest Tolstoi at his best, and the moral attached to each fascinating tale is excellent. Mrs. Richards' charm of style pervades this unique collection of stories. The book is handsomely embellished.

THE AWAKENING OF THE DUCHESS

By FRANCES CHARLES, author of "In the Country God Forgot," "The Siege of Youth," etc. With illustrations in color by I. H. Caliga. 12mo. \$1.50.

Frances Charles, the author of "In the Country God Forgot," writes in an entirely new vein in her latest book, the best that this talented young author has written. It is a pretty and touching story of a lonely little heiress, Roselle, who called her mother, a society favorite, "the Duchess"; and the final awakening of a mother's love for her own daughter.

THE COLONEL'S OPERA CLOAK

By CHRISTINE C. BRUSH. *New Edition.* Illustrated by E. W. Kemble. 12mo. \$1.50.

This favorite story is now issued in a new and attractive form, with artistic renderings of its principal characters and scenes by E. W. Kemble, the celebrated artist of negro character. This bright, clever, and entertaining book is a story with a very novel idea, that of making the "Colonel's Opera Cloak" the hero.

A DAUGHTER OF THE RICH

By M. E. WALLER, author of "The Little Citizen." Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

A delightful book, telling the story of a happy summer in the Green Mountains of Vermont and a pleasant winter in New York. Two of the characters are Hazel Clyde, the daughter of a New York millionaire, and Rose Blossom, a Vermont girl. The book is replete with interesting conversation and bright incident.

NEW AND POPULAR FICTION

SARAH TULDON

By ORME AGNUS, author of "Love in Our Village," "Jan Oxber," etc. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

A remarkable study of an English peasant girl of strong character who was developed by the circumstances of her life into a fine, noble-hearted, and generous woman. — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

A crisp and spirited tale, full of good description and clever portrayals of rural character, as good in some respects as anything Hardy has written. Sarah Tuldon was really a woman worth knowing. — *Brooklyn Eagle*.

BARBARA, A WOMAN OF THE WEST

By JOHN H. WHITSON. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

Mr. Whitson's romance gives a panoramic view of the whole West from Kansas to California, ranching and mining, with glimpses of grand scenery. — *Pittsburg Gazette*.

A story original in ideas, clever in construction, and interesting to the last word. — *N. Y. World*.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

By ANNA CHAPIN RAY. Illustrated in color by Harry C. Edwards. 12mo. \$1.50.

Full of bright bits of philosophy concerning the modern musical artist and his relations to the life and society that surround him to-day, with a close study of the artistic temperament as affected by the exigencies of modern commerce and the attainment of the success that spells money. — *Philadelphia Ledger*.

THE WARS OF PEACE

By A. F. WILSON. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

The American industrial and commercial life of to-day is the absorbing topic dealt with. The stirring events of the destruction of the mill by dynamite, with Theodore inside, and his dramatic rescue, are told vividly and thrillingly. The story is well balanced, skilfully constructed, and decidedly readable. — *Boston Herald*.

GAY

By EVELYN WHITAKER, author of "Miss Toosey's Mission," etc. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.25.

NEW AND POPULAR FICTION

A ROSE OF NORMANDY

By WILLIAM R. A. WILSON. Illustrated by Ch. Grunwald. 12mo. \$1.50.

No more entertaining character has stalked through the pages of any recent novel than that of Henri de Tonti, gentleman, soldier, courtier, gallant—the intrepid hero of countless adventures, but withal the true and constant man and lover. — *Baltimore American*.

LOVE THRIVES IN WAR

A Romance of the Frontier in 1812. By MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY, author of “A Daughter of New France,” etc. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

To a fine historical background, rich with incident and romance, Miss Crowley has added her own originality, her wonderful descriptive powers, in short her gift of story-telling, and has obtained a brilliant and entertaining result. The whole story is crowded with exciting events, tender love scenes, and brilliant description. — *Louisville Courier-Journal*.

A DETACHED PIRATE

By HELEN MILECETE. With illustrations in color by I. H. Caliga. 12mo. \$1.50.

There is the sparkle of champagne in Helen Milecete's latest book. Gay Vandeleur is the pirate, detached by a divorce court, and her first name is no misnomer—not a bit of it. — *Chicago Evening Post*.

One of the clever books of the season. — *Philadelphia North American*.

THE SHADOW OF THE CZAR

By JOHN R. CARLING. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

A romance of the sturdy, wholesome sort, in which the action is never allowed to drag. — *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

Excels in interest Anthony Hope's best efforts. — *Boston Herald*.

LITTLE, BROWN, & COMPANY, *Publishers*

254 WASHINGTON STREET • BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 111574353

~~0 2111 38888 5000~~